

A PLAN FOR FIRST NATIONS-LED AND DESIGNED EDUCATION REFORM IN AUSTRALIA





Apmerengentyele From the Land



The M.K. Turner Report

Akaltye-arle-anthemeye, teaching is a really sacred thing...

akaltye-irrenheke, constantly learning;

arintyeke, seeking it as forever ongoing;

imerneheke, being shown continuously.

That is how it was and is.

Our cultures and languages live in these lands across many Nations. In this report we're giving you a pathway forward for our future, for our children, for their education, for our cultures and our languages. Our children too often fail or are harmed in Western education, Western assessment and Western standards. They are set up to fail. The evidence clearly demonstrates both the harmful effects of the current education system and the benefits of reform. It is time for assimilation to be dismantled. We see the brilliance of children come to life when their environments of learning are founded in their cultures and languages. Our learning systems are the oldest in the world. It is time for a national education policy with a pathway, a timeline and the resources to create a First Nations-led and designed learning system as part of our national education system. If we don't take this pathway, we will keep suffering. Our languages will disappear, our laws will be weakened and our children will be lost. All the strengths that support the foundations of who we are as First Nations people will be extinguished.

Furner, M.K. Iwenhe Tyerrtye: What it Means to Be an Aboriginal Person, compiled by Barry McDonald, translations by Veronica Perrurle Dobson (IAD Press, 2010)

For decades, Elders have been calling for recognition of a First Nations learning system that has been successfully practised on this continent for millennia.

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A First Nations learning system is an established system of education and learning, with its own standards, specialists and practices. And vet since colonisation it has never been systematically embedded in the structures that govern the way First Nations people are taught in Australia. Today, the child of recently arrived migrants has a greater chance of learning in their first language than a First Nations child.

This is despite the evidence showing that embracing First Nations-led and designed education offers real hope in addressing structural disadvantage and improving educational outcomes for First Nations people in Australia. The recognised benefits of First Nations-led and designed education systems include:

- Increased engagement and improved learning outcomes
- Improved health and wellbeing of children, including improved mental health outcomes
- Increased First Nations employment
- The strengthening and revitalising of first languages, many of which are in decline
- Increased engagement of families in children's education
- A reduction in the number of children and young people exiting education early
- Improved economic wellbeing and independence upon exiting school.

This approach, which this report calls Apmerengentyele (named by Dr M.K. Turner OAM), is a complex system of knowledge and practice that underpins the First Nations worldview. While each First Nation has its own language and culture for this system, each has shared values and a common practice.

These common values and practices include the centring of learning from the land and through Elders. It includes a clear vision for excellence and learning

outcomes. The student-teacher relationship is defined through kinship, with learning necessarily integrated across generations. Apmerengentvele places learning within community and across extended hours. Learning occurs throughout life-beyond the hours of a school day and beyond the walls of a mainstream school environment. The systems extend and adjust learning to fit communities, children, geography and cultures. Apmerengentyele has evolved as the oldest learning system in the world. Embedded within it are key innovations now being implemented in Western learning contexts-many of which are considered leading practice.

Apmerengentyele centres First Nations knowledge, practice and standards. It also acknowledges and includes the importance of Western learning outcomes and globalisation in First Nations education.

This report, named after Dr M.K. Turner OAM, provides a roadmap for embracing Apmerengentyele. It is an argument for a significant reform of the Australian education system to recognise and resource Apmerengentyele, with the goal of Apmerengentyele becoming an accessible and widespread education system of choice for First Nations communities across the country.

It is time for a national education policy with a pathway, a timeline and the resources to create a First Nations-led and designed learning system as part of our national education system.

This reform was undertaken 40 years ago in other countries. As a consequence there are now established systems of education in these places, designed and led by Indigenous peoples, spanning early childhood to university. In a similar way, this reform now has the potential to transform educational outcomes for First Nations children in Australia.









Chapter 1 International and National Context and Evidence

The learning systems developed by First Nations people over 65,000 years are the oldest educational frameworks in the history of the world. Before colonisation, they successfully guided countless generations through a process of lifelong growth and contribution to family, community and the land. Yet today this truth is barely acknowledged or understood in the broader Australian population and in Westernised education hierarchies.

The World Bank and UNESCO have recognised the critical importance of children learning in their first language, or mother tongue, linking first language learning to greater success in educating children as well as contributing more broadly to the country's economic, social and political life. Despite this, nowhere in Australia is there a system for First Nations education that leads in first language and culture. There continues to be around 120 First Nations languages still spoken (roughly 100 of which are considered severely or critically endangered).

Research from overseas shows that children who are educated in their first language and first culture do better in school. Aotearoa New Zealand and Hawai'i both made structural changes to their education systems in the 1980s to enable culturally centred education delivered in their first language. Cultural, language and education outcomes for Indigenous children improved in both places, while other metrics—health, economic development, equity and more—also increased.

Regrettably, Australia has chosen not to embrace these proven ways of learning to ensure its First Nations people are taught in a way that works best for them, despite the fact that doing so would preserve language and culture and begin healing the deep wounds inflicted by colonisation. The development of bilingual schools in the 1970s was led by First Nations Elders seeking education reform. However, it began petering out just a decade later due to a lack of resources and political support, with only a few remaining post 2008.

Before they were interrupted and damaged by invasion and subsequent colonisation, First Nations learning systems here were widespread; each was highly effective, with robust governance and well-defined and understood pedagogies. While local systems were uniquely developed and maintained by local communities, they invariably shared common features, many of which survive to this day in communities across Australia.

In 2019, a systemic review of the literature on First Nations education in Australia was conducted. The review found that when First Nations epistemologies and methodologies are incorporated into classrooms with the active participation of First Nations individuals, there is a positive impact on learning outcomes for both teachers and students.

However, First Nations epistemologies continue to be oppressed and denied within Australian academic, knowledge and policy structures, which focus on assimilation. Remedial learning programs and 'off-country' solutions such as boarding schools are prioritised over culturally designed education. It can cost approximately \$50K per year per child to attend boarding schools. If the same funding was invested in local community-designed and led schools, high-quality education could be created for every First Nations child.

Chapter 2 Response to Gonski and Closing the Gap

David Gonski undertook two major reviews to improve standards and achieve educational equity for all students in the Australian education system. "Through Growth to Achievement. The Report of The Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools" (2018) provided important recommendations for improvement in five key areas. However, they did not fully address the barriers experienced by First Nations children and neglected to discuss First Nations educational practices. The most recent 2023 Closing the Gap report confirms the serious concerns that educational outcomes for First Nations students are not on track. This chapter responds to each of these five recommendations.

The first recommendation area, titled 'Laying the foundation for the early years', emphasised the importance of investing in early childhood education for children who face vulnerability. But while research clearly establishes that children from 'disadvantaged backgrounds' benefit from early years learning, there has been no research into the cultural risks of placing First Nations children in Western learning environments. Chapter 3 of our report calls for the establishment of the Apmerengentyele education system, which begins in early childhood and which supports language, cultural immersion and pedagogy.

The second area of Gonski's report is titled 'Equipping every student to grow and succeed in a changing world'. However, equipping First Nations students to succeed in a changing world requires a range of structural reforms in education overlooked in the Gonski reports. These include the introduction of quality educators, effective language of instruction, and recognition of cultural strengths in First Nations education systems.

Area three of the Gonski report is titled 'Creating, supporting and valuing a profession of expert educators'. In Chapter 2, we explain that doing this for First Nations children requires two categories of educator. The first is a first cultural educator: a First Nations person recognised and authorised within their own community. They do not necessarily have a Western qualification. The second is a First Nations educator trained in Western education.

The fourth area concerns empowering and supporting school leaders. In a First Nations context, this means ensuring that First Nations people lead their educational systems. The importance of collective First Nations governance systems is paramount. To achieve educational equity, we need an education system run and governed by First Nations people.

The final area discussed by Gonski is 'Raising and achieving ambitions through innovation and continuous improvement'. Doing so requires robust research and evaluation. However, mainstream research and evaluation are dominated by Western-trained academics and a cultural worldview that is foreign to First Nations people. Not only do First Nations people need to design and lead education, but we also need to lead the research and evaluation of our educational systems.

We can review our performance by conducting our own research, using our cultural and global educational standards. We will better understand the barriers and drivers to success and strive for excellence.

Chapter 3 Akaltue: Our Education, Our Way

First Nations people recognise the government's education system. The tragedy is that successive Australian governments have not reciprocated this generosity. Governments have simply wanted First Nations people to fit into a colonised education system that is not made for them. This is why mainstream education does not work for First Nations children.

What First Nations children need is a First Nations education system that also values Western knowledge and practice. To that end, First Nations

education leaders have for many years explored the 'meeting place' between these two systems.

Every Nation has a unique worldview from which its lore, knowledge and epistemology is derived. Despite their differences, common elements link all First Nations knowledge systems. For example, all First Nations learning systems are founded on reciprocity and inclusion, and focus on the relationship between the student, the land, kinship and lore.

In addition to teaching facts and skills, First Nations education emphasises the learner's responsibility to use that knowledge in the right way. First Nations education begins at birth and continues through life to Eldership. Our Elders hold the ultimate authority; they are their community's 'professors'.

Despite the efforts of First Nations educators, First Nations communities have had little support and faced many challenges in their efforts to deliver education in their first languages and cultures. The solution to this problem is simple: give First Nations communities the autonomy to deliver 'our education, our way'. As Dr Marika said in her 'Leaching the Poison' paper, "The solution lies within us... not in 'answers' being imposed on us".

Chapter 4 First Nations Education in Practice—Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground)

Children's Ground, also known as Ampekenhe Ahelhe in the Arrernte language of Central Australia, is a national organisation led by First Nations people. Its vision is for First Nations people across Australia to achieve self-determination and enjoy social, cultural, political and economic justice.

It was founded in 2011 under the guidance of Dr M.K. Turner and other Elders and is driven by the principles of Apmerengentyele, meaning

'from the land'. This serves as a compass for its mission to improve education, health, law, governance, economic and social systems for First Nations. It emphasises the importance of learning, living, respecting and protecting our children, languages, cultures and environment. It sees the establishment of a First Nations-led and designed education system as a central reform in the push for greater self-determination for First Nations people in Australia.

A curriculum framework derived from Apmerengentyele, called Arrernte-kenhe Angkentye, is used today to teach literacy, science, history, maths, ethics-all of the elements of the Australian curriculum through a First Nations worldview. Arrernte-kenhe Angkentye also recognises that First Nations peoples have their own areas of knowledge that need to be centred in the curriculum. For First Nations people, everything is connected: history, music, dance, songs, stories, language, country. Increasingly, this is how it is for Western people too, as growing numbers of Western educators talk about the importance of collaboration, relationships and rich learning content in the real world. This is the way we teach through Apmerengentyele at Children's Ground.

Children's Ground is committed to measuring and building evidence for Arrernte-kenhe Angkentye, so it can become the learning system of choice for First Nations children.

Expert evaluations have shown this way of learning has led to a significant increase in engagement in early learning in communities where it has a presence. First Nations and Western-trained educators found that children taught this way progressed not just in their first language and cultural knowledge, but also in their English literacy and numeracy. The programs also had a significant impact on employment and community wellbeing.

Children's Ground wants to use this evidence to ensure all communities have the right and support to lead their own learning.

Chapter 5

Utyerre Apanpe–National Network of First Nations Educators

In 2019, a national network of First Nations educators known as Utyerre Apanpe was established to advocate for a national strategy to improve the education outcomes of First Nations children. The network is led by Elders and made up of over 50 First Nations educators from over 15 Nations across Australia. Its terms of reference are to:

1. Support First Nations educators to gather and share practice, knowledge, history and future plans.

2. Establish a National Language and Resource Development Centre governed by First Nations educators to set standards and be a shared resource for:

- First Nations learning principles, practice and standards
- Local language and resource development centres nationally
- Curriculum development
- Training and workforce development
- First Nations-led and designed evidence-based research.

3. Establish a First Nations-designed and led education system in Australia.

The network promotes the importance of first cultural education, emphasising the authority of Elders and how connection to family and land provides a strong sense of identity and belonging. It also recognises that the diversity of First Nations people across Australia means that space must be created for locally led approaches to education that respect the integrity of varying knowledge systems, country, culture and lore. The network is committed to creating this space while maintaining key principles and visions of First Nations education across Australia.

The network recognises that First Nations educators perform roles in both first cultural and Western eduction, both as cultural learning practitioners and Western-trained teachers. Both are important.

Elders are the community's 'professors', supported by senior cultural educators. It is critical to raise the cultural authority of educators who do not have a Western training certificate.

Chapter 6 First Nations Education Recommendations

Australian governments commit to the establishment of a new First Nations education system.

Australian governments recognise and partner with an independent National First Nations governance body to develop and oversight the new First Nations education system.

Establish a comprehensive national network of First Nations Language and Literacy Centres for every Nation/ language group.

Australian governments support the teaching of First Nations languages in the new system, through a new national Language of Instruction (LoI) policy.

Develop and support a First Nations education workforce.

Establish the M.K. Turner Institute as a national centre for First Nations knowledge, practice, research and evaluation in the new First Nations education system.



Who is M.K. Turner?

M.K. was a visionary. She was one of the most prominent leaders of the Arrente Nation.

Dr M.K. Turner OAM was an Arrernte Elder. cultural professor, translator, linguist, artist, author and human rights champion. She was a strict law woman who never sought power but held power.

She was involved in the development and leadership of Aboriginal organisations across Central Australia. Her passion was the preservation of language and culture. She had over forty years of experience as an interpreter and educator.

She was a key contributor to the Eastern and Central Arrente to English Dictionary published in 1994. She authored two books. Bush Foods: Arrernte Foods of Central Australia: Nhenhe-areye Anwerne-arle Arlkweme (1996) and Iwenhe Tyerrtye: What It Means to Be an Aboriginal Person (2010) as well as contributing and advising on others. She was instrumental in revitalising her critically endangered Akarre-Akityerre languages.

In 1996, M.K. received an Order of Australia for her service to the Aboriginal community of Central Australia. She was recognised by Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education in 2022 with the bestowal of an Honorary Doctorate.

Over sixty First Nations educators participated in this report.

M.K. knew that law and culture is where the people and the land will always find their peace and wellbeing-that the power to heal, to learn, and find solutions are held in language and land and way of being that has been held by ancestors for time immemorial.

She set the standards for humility, culture, giving, responsibility and care. She generously gifted her knowledge to many, so that it would continue for future generations. She was constantly worried about the loss of culture through the loss of language and promoted standards of excellence and integrity. She was passionate about ensuring First Language and First Cultural education was revitalised and dedicated her life to ensuring this was re-established as a right for future generations.

Apmerengentyele, represented in this document as an image, was four years in the making. Through this process, M.K. translated the complex worldview of her law and culture into this visual representation. It underpins the foundations of learning and life and the recommendations of this Report.

M.K. passed away two weeks before the launch of her report.



Children's Ground Elders

Mrs L. Palmer OAM (dec) was an Arrernte woman who grew up in Alice Springs and then Santa Teresa. She was an important Elder, knowledge holder and educator. Kwementyaye was a long-term activist for the rights of First Nations people and worked in education and health, paving the way for the next generation. She was a driving force setting standards for Children's Ground to establish education on country through the land and through Apmerengentyele. She and M.K. worked closely together.

Therese Ryder is a respected Arrernte Elder, linguist and artist. She is a teacher and published author. She was a significant contributor to the "Central and Eastern Arrernte Dictionary" (1994) and also authored a book Ayeye Thipe-akerte: Arrernte Stories About Birds (2017).

*

Note: the way language is used in this document changes based on the contribution of authors.

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Utyerre Apanpe, First Nations Educators' Network, reviewed the document content and recommendations across three meetings. Over sixty First Nations educators participated.

Children's Ground **First Nations Educators** and Governance members

Felicity Hayes is an Arrernte apmereke-artweye (Traditional Owner) for Mparntwe (Alice Springs) and a co-director and senior cultural educator at Children's Ground. She has 30 years' experience as an educator in Alice Springs in Central Australia. She is a senior member of Ingkerrekele Arntarnte-areme. the Governance Committee for Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground, Alice Springs).

L. Gorey (dec) was an Arrernte grandmother and mother from Mpweringke Anapipe. She was a qualified interpreter and worked as a senior cultural educator at Children's Ground. She was a senior member of Ingkerrekele Arntarnte-areme, the Governance Committee for Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe. Ms. Gorev passed away in 2022.

Veronica Turner is a co-director and senior cultural educator at Children's Ground. She is a senior member of Ingkerrekele Arntarnte-areme, the Governance Committee for Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe.

Amunda Gorey is an Arrernte next generation leader with experience in research. She is an artist and worked closely with M.K. Turner to translate her knowledge into visual form as part of this review.

William Tilmouth is an Arrerte

man and is the founding Chair of Children's Ground. As a member of the stolen generation, he has dedicated his life to the rights and self determination of his people. Over the past forty years he has led a range of Aboriginal organisations. As founding Chair of Children's Ground he has established a First Nations designed and led solution for his people to achieve long term change, with culture, learning and language at its heart. He was named Male Elder of the Year in the National NAIDOC awards in 2023.

Jane Vadiveloo is the founding CEO of Children's Ground and has a Masters in Forensic Psychology. Jane has worked with First Nations leaders for 25 years to uplift First Nations systems of knowledge and practice as the foundation for justice, reform and long term wellbeing for future generations.

Stacey Campton is an Aboriginal woman descendant from Gunggari country in South West Queensland. Stacey has teaching and policy development qualifications and lived experience working in First Nations affairs for 30+ years in all sectorsgovernment, education (tertiary) and more recently not for profit. Stacey is a Director at Children's Ground in the area of systems change and access by our people to self-determine their education, health and economic independence in holistic ways. She provides secretariat support to Uyterre Apanpe.

The Review Panel and contributors: **Members of Utyerre Apanpe, First Nations Educators' Network**

Lisa Fieldhouse is a Koori woman from New South Wales. Lisa was raised in Balga, Western Australia on Whadjuk Noongar land. Lisa's father is part of the Stolen Generation. Lisa has worked in all three educational sectors: Government, Catholic and independent. In 2004 Lisa started with the Association of Independent Schools Western Australia (AISWA) to run Future Footprints, a program designed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who were attending one of the 17 participating boarding schools in Perth. She also sits on the Western Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Consultative Council (WAAETCC). Lisa is a strong advocate for ensuring First Nations students have quality educational outcomes and complete connections to their family, community, culture and identity.

Jo Willmot is a widely respected Wakka Wakka woman from Queensland who has lived in Adelaide for over 40 years. As a recently retired practice manager for Aboriginal Services, Jo is a committed advocate for cultural awareness. Her influence in this role has led to the development of programs within Relationships Australia SA specifically designed to support the professional development, career pathways and cultural safety of First Nations people and staff. Jo has also developed theinstitute's locally and nationally adopted Cultural Fitness training program. Jo is a dedicated educator and is committed to education outcomes that privilege First Nations language and culture, delivered by a First Nations workforce.

Stephanie Armstrong is a proud Gamilaraay/Bigambul woman who has strong links with the state of NSW. Victoria. WA and SA through family and friends. From a very early age she looked to teach and learn. A large extended family provided her with many realities that guided her teaching. Her 40 years of experience in education provided her with the satisfaction of talking and listening to many children and their families. Stephanie has been working as a health and education consultant for many years. She initiated a number of projects related to connecting with and supporting First Nations senior secondary school girls and was responsible for introducing them to a number of health, education and on Country careers. She's been privileged to have taught and guided many teachers in the Pilbara and Kimberley area. Stephanie has presented at state and national conferences, often seeking support for two way learning and First Nation schooling. She is currently a consultant for Culture is Life.

Yalmay Yunupingu is a Yolngu Matha Dhuwaya Elder and retired teacher linguist at Yirrkala Community School with over 50 years' experience in education. Yalmay is an expert linguist who taught classes in Yolngu Matha. She taught first language to non-Indigenous staff in her school and community, mentors teachers, is an author of books, sits on various boards and works with community engagement forums for various community organisations. Yalmay has committed her life to contributing to her community as a human rights advocate and public speaker and continues to work for her community and people.

Dr Rhonda Coopes is a

Pairrebenne (Palawa) woman from Lutruwita (Tasmania). She now lives in Cairns. She started teaching in 1979 in Tasmania and has taught in the secondary sector, the TAFE system and in universities (both online and face to face). She has also worked in the central office of Education Queensland and in research. Her master's degree in teaching English as a Second or Other Language and a doctoral degree in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education are complementary for working to bring transformation in the educational experience and outcomes of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Dr Coopes is a valued member of the Stronger, Smarter Institute.



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CENTRAL RECOMMENDATION

Australian governments <u>commit</u> to the establishment of a new First Nations education system. **Government recognises** and partners with an independent national First Nations governance body to develop and oversight the new First Nations education system.

> Develop and support a First Nations education workforce.

Establish a comprehensive national network of First Nations Language and Literacy Centres for every Nation/ language group. Australian governments support the teaching of First Nations languages in the new system, through a new national Language of Instruction (Lol) policy.

Establish the M.K. Turner Institute as a national centre for First Nations knowledge, practice, research and evaluation in the new First Nations education system.

What is The M.K. Turner **Report?**

For First Nations children to excel in education, the Australian education system requires significant reform. The M.K. Turner *Report* presents a road map for reform for First Nations education.

"We learn through our lives and we are always learning. But when warlpele came and changed things, we couldn't teach our children in the same way. Our struggle is a struggle that First Nations people have faced around the world. How do we teach our children so they can grow up to be 'full human beings'?"

Dr Elizabeth Ellis Ngaanyatjarra woman and educator This report has been considered in the context of

- First Nations educational systems that have delivered and evolved over 65,000 years
- International and national developments in First Nations education
- The findings and recommendations of the two government reviews led by David Gonski: Review of Funding for Schooling (2011) and Through Growth to Achievement: The Report of The Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools, Australian Government (2018)
- 2020 Mparntwe Declaration
- Closing the Gap Reports from 2010 to present.

Despite a commitment to improved education, Australia continues to fail in its efforts to create a fair and equitable education system. Reviews by David Gonski in 2011 and 2018 highlighted concerns of ongoing structural inequity and the poor performance of our education system in meeting the needs of those who experience the greatest educational disadvantage.^{2, 3, 4}

The educational outcomes for First Nations children in Australia are the worst in the country, with outcomes worsening as children live more remotely. ⁵ National Closing the Gap data reveals failures of government to achieve equity in attendance, attainment, enrolment and quality of education for our children. Key educational targets are not on track. On the ground, we see the failure of the system, with our children struggling to engage with school, struggling to succeed in school and experiencing cultural harm.

We offer the M.K. Turner Report and recommendations to enable full the reform of our educational systems so that they honour First Nations knowledge, practice and culture. Through the recommendations in this review we can achieve the reform necessary to ensure our children can have access to excellence in education.



- Gonski, D., Boston, K., Greiner, K., Lawrence, C., Scales, B., & Tannock, P. (2011), Review of funding for schooling: Final report, Australian Gover Department of Education and Training.

- 6 Kral, I. and Ellis, L., 2020, In the time of their lives: Wangka kutjupa-kutuparringu: How talk has changed in the Western Desert; UWA Publishing

Education has the power to transform lives. It supports young people to realise their potential by providing skills they need to participate in the economy and in society, and contributing to every aspect of their wellbeing. Our vision is for a world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face.

Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration 2019



Australian Government (2018). Through Growth to Achievement, The Report of The Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools, Canberra

Bonnor, C., Kidson, P., Piccoli, A., Sahlberg, P. & Wilson, R. (2021). Structural Failure: Why Australia keeps falling short of its educational goals. Sydney: UNSW Gonski Institute Northern Territory Government data show that First Nations students attendance at public schools dropped between 2020 and 2022 to just 56 per cent with attendance rates in "very remote", dropping to 42 per cent in 2022 https://education.nt.gov.au/statistics-research-and-strategies/enrolment-and-attendance

Language and culture are intimately connected. Languages hold knowledge systems that are unique to the holders of that language. It is widely known that with the loss of languages, we are losing significant and important expertise through <u>knowledge erosion</u>'.

Chapter 1: International and National Context

Evidence of the importance of a First Nations based learning system.

First Nations pedagogy and learning systems in Australia arise from over 65,000 years of practice and development. Our learning systems are largely unseen, poorly understood and not recognised in the mainstream.

First Nations systems of education continue in Australia today. While there are shared principles and practice across Nations, education remains sovereign to each Nation.

Our children are largely forced into government education systems that are failing them. The government does not see our strengths nor the damage that is happening to our children in the mainstream system.

Why educating kids through their first culture matters

The language and culture of the learner are critical to their educational success. Children who are educated in their first language and through their first culture are more engaged, perform better and are set up for success.⁷ Language and culture are intimately connected. Languages hold knowledge systems that are unique to the holders of that language. It is widely known that with the loss of languages, we are losing significant and important expertise through 'knowledge erosion'.^{8,9}

In colonised nations around the world. First Peoples continue to live through their culture despite significant cultural oppression and

trauma. The denial of both language and culture by the state, across many countries, resulted in death, forced assimilation, cultural oppression and enduring generational trauma for First Nations people. One of the impacts of colonisation has been a catastrophic loss of first languages across the world. Trauma continues in the prevalence of unconscious and conscious bias and racism within most colonial systems of government. This racism continues to damage our children, impacting their physical, mental and cultural health.

The attempted genocide experienced by First Peoples across the world failed in eradicating both the people and the cultures of First Peoples. While our cultures are expressed differently depending on each Nation and colonial impact, First Nations people retain a distinct cultural identity. The worldviews of First Nations people hold fundamental differences to the worldview of other cultures. particularly colonising Western cultures. Two of these key differences are our relationship with the land and sea, and people (kinship). How children are born, grow and learn is driven by clear cultural systems that are foundational to education and knowledge.

First Nations learning systems, which continue today across the world, offer the areatest opportunity for First Nations children to heal, grow, learn and be empowered.

When it works: International developments in First Nations-led and designed education

Globally, First Nations people have been working tirelessly to have their languages officially recognised and to take control of the education of their children. Some countries have officially recognised first languages and have made structural changes in their education systems to enable first language and immersion education. Australia is well behind other countries where First Nationsled education systems have evolved over the past fifty years.



UNESCO 2012; Why Languages Matter for the

Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education

extinction triggers the loss of unique medicinal

9 K. David Harrison. (2007). "When Languages Die: The

pnas.2103683118

Of Human Knowledge"

Millennium Development Goals; UNESCO Bangkol

Cámara-Leret, R. and Bascompte, J. (2021) Language

knowledge Proceedings of the National Academy o Sciences, 118 (24) e2103683118; DOI: 10.1073/

Extinction Of The World's Languages And The Erosion

First Nations educators hold knowledge and practices that have been passed on through generations and since before time... we hold the future for our next generations. We recognise our children as being wonderful and engaged learners. We recognise our systems of teaching and education as leading and best practice. We recognise the importance of families and communities in educating our children. Education must be designed by our communities and delivered in our homelands and our communities by our people.

Excerpt Utyerre Apanpe First Nations Educators' Network Statement, October 2020

In his review of international developments in Indigenous Immersion Education, May ¹⁰ provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges, developments and importance of language immersion schooling. Key developments since the 1970s include First Nations-led and designed in a number of South American countries beginning with Peru in the 1970s, as well as in Canada, New Zealand, Norway and the USA. The Sámi Language Act was passed in 1992 in Finland to recognise Northern Sámi as its official regional language; a separate Sámi curriculum was introduced in Finland in 1997.

May notes, however, that even when there is an official policy to support first language schooling, it does not always translate to effective practice. First Nations education can be at risk of being compromised by the pedagogy and practice of the dominant culture and educational structures.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, immersion education emerged in Aotearoa New Zealand and Hawai'i. The movement was led by First Nations people in response to the rapid decline in first language speakers and a commitment to language revitalisation.

In Aotearoa, grandparents began language nests and the establishment of Te Kōhanga Reo, often referred to as immersion schooling. Te Kōhanga Reo focused on Māori language and values in early childhood learning. Led by Elders who were fluent speakers, the movement began a transformative change in the educational rights and access of Māori people.

In Aotearoa, the movement began in early childhood and preschool and then developed through all levels of the education system through to university. It became recognised in the state education system.

"Despite a historu of educational policy failure in New Zealand, the 1980s saw a radical change occur in respect of Māori education and schoolina. This change did not come out of the education and schooling system that was essentially designed to reproduce and perpetuate the status auo of Pakeha (White New Zealander) dominance. The educational and schooling revolution that occurred in New Zealand in the 1980s developed out of Māori communities who were so concerned with the loss of Māori language, knowledge and culture that they took matters into their own hands and set up their own learning institutions at preschool, elementary school, secondary school and tertiary levels."

Professor Graham Hingangaroa Smith 11

In 1987, the Māori Language Act recognised Te Reo as an official language. In 1989, the Education Act formally recognised Kura Kaupapa Māori (Māori-language immersion schools—Kura) as educational institutions. The pedagogy, philosophy and practice are founded on Māori culture. In 1990, the Education Act was again amended to recognise wānanga as tertiary educational institutions.

2013, May, S. Indigenous immersion education: International developments; Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education 1:1 (2013)
Smith, G. (2003) Indigenous Struggle for the Transformation of Education and Schooling. The University of Auckland, N.Z. Keynote Address to the Alaskan

A similar development occurred in the same period through Aha Pūnana Leo, immersion schooling in Hawai'i. Both New Zealand and Hawai'i have been at the forefront of the global movement in cultural and language revitalisation.

Educational outcomes of First Nations children in immersion, bilingual and bi-cultural schools across the world have shown comparable or better educational outcomes than English-only education. ¹² In Hawai'i, May notes that the leaders of these movements were driven by the survival and expansion of Hawaiian culture and language, rather than solely on academic achievement. Throughout the 1990s, these indigenous language immersion programs achieved comparable or better educational outcomes at the end of elementary schooling in standardised state tests in relation to peers in English-only programs.

The impact of First Nations cultural and language immersion schools extends beyond learning outcomes. Outcomes are also shown across empowerment and self-determination, health, language and cultural revitalisation, knowledge protection, wellbeing and economic development of First Nations individuals and communities. ^{13, 14}

Celebrated educational leader Professor Graham Smith speaks to the significant impact that educational empowerment had for Māori people beyond education and encompassing social, political and cultural empowerment. Smith notes. "The revolution was not so much about the stunning language revitalisation initiatives, (which is the popularly espoused interpretation of the revolution); in this view these were merely the outward visible signs of a much more profound revolution. The `real' revolution of the 1980s was a shift in mindset of large numbers of Maori peoplea shift away from waiting for things to be done to them, to doing things for themselves; a shift away from an emphasis on reactive politics to an emphasis on being more proactive; a shift from negative motivation to positive motivation; a reawakening of the Maori imagination that had been stifled and diminished by colonisation processes." 15

UNESCO: The international decade of indigenous languages

Leaders of the movement for language and cultural revitalisation in education were instrumental in the development of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and Article 14 which states:

 a) Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

b) States shall, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for Indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

Despite the efforts and success of some countries, The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs highlights that: "...despite the numerous international instruments that proclaim universal rights to education, indigenous peoples do not fully enjoy these rights, and an education gap between indigenous peoples and the rest of the population remains critical, worldwide." ¹⁶

In 2021, UNESCO announced the international decade of Indigenous languages with a global action plan. ¹⁷ The strategy aims to preserve, revitalise and promote indigenous languages "...across all sociocultural, economic, environmental, and political domains" as a driver for justice and equity.

Output 1 from this global action plan is to achieve "Inclusive, equitable, intercultural, quality education and lifelong learning environments and opportunities in Indigenous languages provided in formal, non-formal and informal educational settings."

Educational equity and justice are critically linked to language. First Nations Elders and learning experts around the world have promoted language as the centre of educational and cultural justice. First language has been the hallmark of immersion and First Nations learning systems worldwide.

Federation of Natives (AFN) Convention. Anchorage, Alaska, U.S 12 Lindholm-Leary, Kathryn & Genesee, Fred. (2014). Student outcomes in one-way, two-way, and indigenous language immersion education. Journal of Immersion

and Content-Based Language Education. 2.10.1075/jicb.2.2.01lin.

Coates, T. and Leech-Ngo, T. (2016) Overview of the Benefits of First Nations Language Immersion, Wise Practices for Indigenous Language Immersion, and Provisions for Supporting Immersion Education in the First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act; Canadian Journal of Children's Rights vol. 3, no. 1.
Keegan, Peter. (1996). The Benefits of Immersion Education—A review of the New Zealand and overseas literature.

Keegan, Peter. (1996). The Benefits of Immersion Education – A review of the New Zealand and overseas literature.
Smith, G. H. (2003) Kaupapa Maori Theory: Theorizing Indigenous Transformation of Education & Schooling The University of Auckland & Te Whare Wananga o

Awanuiarangi: tribal-university; New Zealand. 'Kaupapa Maori Symposium' NZARE / AARE Joint Conference 16 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Indigenous Peoples (2023) https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/mandated-areas1/education.htm

UNESCO (2021) Global action plan of the international decade of indigenous languages (IDIL2022-2032)

When it works: First Language in Education —International Evidence

The World Bank estimates that there are 476 million indigenous people across 90 countries, making up 5% of the world's population. ¹⁹ Indigenous people are reported to speak up to 75% of the world's languages. ²⁰ First languages across the world are under threat due to the impact of colonisation.

Internationally, indigenous children fare poorly in state-based education, impacting their social, emotional, health and economic wellbeing and resulting in marginalisation, discrimination and cultural loss and harm. International research has evidenced that children struggle at school when they are forced to learn in languages and through cultures that are not their own. Education systems that are foreign and neither use the languages of the learner nor respect their cultures make it extremely difficult for children to engage, stay in school and learn. Evidence shows that this has an impact at both individual and community levels and contributes to generational cycles of marginalisation and discrimination for whole minority groups. ^{21, 22} UNESCO has long promoted the primary importance of both language and culture as central to learning and development.

18 UNESCO (2021) Global action plan of the international decade of indigenous languages (IDIL2022-2032)

- 19 Indigenous Peoples. (2021, March 19). World Bank. https://www.worldbank org/en/topic/indigenouspeoples
- 20 McCarty, T., & Nicholas, S. (2012). Indigenous education: Local and global perspectives. In M. Martin-Jones, A. Blackledge, & A. Creese (Eds.), The Routledge handbook of multilingualism (pp. 145–166). New York, NY: Routledg
- 21 UNESCO 2012; Why Languages Matter for the Millennium Development Goals; UNESCO Bangkok Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education
- 22 International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank 2021 LOUD AND CLEAR: Effective Language of Instruction Policies For Learning; A World Bank Policy Approach Paper
- 23 UNESCO 2012 ibid

30

UNESCO REPORT - 2012 Why languages matter for the Millennium Development Goals

A growing body of research worldwide demonstrates that instruction in the mother tongue, beginning in the first years of school and continuing for as long as possible, helps girls and boys in numerous ways. Teaching children for a recommended six to eight years in their mother tongue—as well as gradually introducing national or other dominant languages (sometimes called the mother tongue)—has the following outcomes:

Children receive a good foundation:

When taught first in their own languages, children learn better, are more self-confident and are well equipped to transfer their literacy and numeracy skills to additional languages.

Children perform better:

Evidence from linguistically diverse countries worldwide shows that children taught first in their most familiar language are more likely to thrive and excel in school.

Fewer children repeat grades:

Studies have found that children who start formal education in a second or foreign language are more likely to repeat school years.

Fewer children drop out of school:

Children who start formal education in a second or foreign language are much more likely to experience frustration and failure, resulting in higher dropout rates for these children. Worldwide, some 50 percent of out-of-school children use a language at home that is not the language used at school.

Children have more family support:

When children learn in their mother tongue, parents and families can be involved and support their education. When children are learning in a second or foreign language, families are often excluded from the process.

Cycles of exclusion are broken:

By including families and drawing on local cultural heritage, mother tongue-based education contributes to communities' social and cultural well-being and fosters inclusiveness within the wider society." ²³ "Languages around the world continue to disappear at alarming rates. Many of those are indigenous languages, which represent peoples' identities, cultures and complex systems of knowledge developed and accumulated over thousands of years. When peoples' freedom to use their language is not guaranteed, this limits their freedom of thought, freedom of opinion and expression, including artistic expression, as well as their access to education, health and information, justice, decent employment, their participation in cultural life, and other rights."¹⁸

WORLD BANK **POLICY PAPER-2021** Why language matters: the loud and clear

The World Bank recognises the critical importance of language and learning. The Human Capital Project of the World Bank links first language to success in learning and the preconditions for people to participate equally in the economic, social and political life of the country. At a global level they found that "inadequate language of instruction policies" has resulted in pervasive 'learning poverty.'

The World Bank policy paper, Loud and Clear, provides a comprehensive review of evidence and research regarding the significant impact learning through first language (L1) has on the educational outcomes of students. A review of research found that low learning outcomes may be a reflection of inadequate language of instruction policies. The paper identifies that the children impacted by these policies are often those who are disadvantaged in other ways, such as by socioeconomic status and distance from urban centres. They found a huge 90 percent or more of students may fail to acquire foundational skills such as basic literacy and numeracy in schools that implement these policies.

The review found that appropriate language of instruction policies facilitate learning. However, it also found that, globally, good language of instruction policies remain the exception, not the rule.

Key findings included:

- Poor Lol (language of instruction) policies harm learning, access, equity, cost-effectiveness and inclusion
- Most learning poverty is in languages that use only a few writing systems
- Academic outcomes are better for children taught and assessed in their first language (L1) than students taught and assessed in a second language (L2), in both reading and mathematics
- In low resource contexts, children who start school in an L1 learn an L2 more effectively than students who start school in the L2.

The review emphasises that "...appropriate language of instruction policies facilitate learning and more".

This policy paper has identified several key requirements to achieve educational equity that are relevant to Australia and our policies and investments for First Nations students.

These recommendations are summarised in Table 1.

When children are first taught in a language that they speak and understand well they learn more, are better placed to learn other languages, are more likely to stay in school, and enjoy a school experience appropriate to their culture and local circumstances... Appropriate Lol policies also promote equity in schools and in labor markets, improve the cost-effectiveness of education, and promote inclusiveness. Good LoI policies should be a cornerstone of effective national human capital development strategies, and therefore of acute concern to national policy makers and development partners.²⁴

Loud and Clear, The World Bank

Table 1:

The new World Bank policy approach on Lol²⁵ as part of the operationalisation of the Literacy Policy Package in support of the Bank's new Learning Target, is based around **5 principles**:

PRINCIPLE 1	PRINCIPLE 2	PRINCI
		L2
Teach children in a language they understand starting with Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services through at least the first six years of schooling. It is critical that instruction be in the language most students speak and understand best.	Use a language children understand for instruction in academic subjects beyond wider reading and writing. Students need to master reading and writing in a broad range of disciplines and in all school subjects.	Introdu addition langua desired foreign la with a fo oral langua skill Student master languag basic edu if instruct sequenc optimi

Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank



25 The World Bank (2021) LOUD AND CLEAR: Effective Language of Instruction Policies for Learning; A World Bank Policy Approach Paper International Bank for

²⁴ The World Bank (2021) LOUD AND CLEAR: Effective Language of Instruction Policies for Learning; A World Bank Policy Approach Paper International Bank

for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank

The World Bank has found that investing in L1 instruction leads to better education outcomes and brings cost-saving benefits, both socially and economically. The report challenges assumptions and concerns regarding the costs of providing instruction to every child in their first language. This holds true for countries with small numbers of languages and those that are highly linguistically diverse. There are many languages worldwide that do not have written orthographies. This is true for many first languages in Australia. The investment in first language policy, education and resource development is considered a priority.

"Even under conservative assumptions, the value of the benefits (lower costs and higher productivity) consistently exceeds the additional investment costs."²⁶

The World Bank Loud and Clear policy paper outlines key priorities to achieve equity in education.

These include:

• A strong understanding of the linguistic context: understanding the numbers of languages, status and use of languages and demographics.

• Standardisation of orthographies for writing languages where there are few speakers: the importance of developing orthographies for small, unwritten languages to support mastery of written languages. This requires an understanding of both the number of languages and the number of written systems for instruction that need to be developed.

• Ensuring quality Learning and Teaching Materials (LTM) to support curriculum and learning.

26 The World Bank (2021) ibid

- High-quality LTM that are relevant to the context of the learner.
- 'Academic vocabulary' development for certain school subjects (e.g., mathematics). The development of high-quality L1 teaching and learning materials, lesson plans and instruction.

• Developing and implementing effective communication strategies for all stakeholder groups (State/Territory and Federal Ministers, departments of education, community, other government departments, teaching bodies, curriculum bodies). This outreach and advocacy are critical for policy uptake and sustainability.

<u>The evidence shows that delivering</u> <u>education through a child's first language</u> (L1) will result in:

- increased access and equity
- improved learning outcomes
- reduced repetition and dropout rates
- sociocultural benefits
- economic benefits
- lower overall costs ^{27, 28, 29}

Research provides clear recommendations for nation states to create educational justice and equity. These findings and recommendations are consistent with the leadership voiced by First Nations Elders and educational leaders for over half a century.

Australia has a linguistically diverse population making the findings on first language instruction critical in relation to educational policy.

With over 100 First Nations languages still being spoken and the oldest living cultures in the world, major policy reform and investment is required to establish effective educational outcomes for First Nations children.

Recommendation g Australian governments support the teaching of First Nations languages in the new system, through a new national Language of Instruction (Lol) policy.

Action: Consistent with the recommendations of the World Bank on Language of Instruction (Lol), it is recommended that the Australian Government establish a comprehensive policy to protect and implement new practices and standards for First Language education for First Nations students.



The policy should include direction for resourcing, standards and reform with the following guidelines:

• That the policy is developed in partnership with Utyerre Apanpe members, First Languages Australia, Batchelor College and other First language leaders

• That the policy is authorised by Elders with First Language authority

• That the policy articulates the rights of children to learn through their First Languages starting with Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

• That the policy is consistent with recommendations throughout the MK Turner Report

• That the Government support the policy through resourcing and structures for First Nations immersion and culturally led and designed education and language and literacy centres

• That the Government invest resources for the development of comprehensive whole-of-life and culture Learning and Teaching Materials (LTM) that are relevant to the context of the learner, culture and community across the learning journey from early childhood through to tertiary education

• That the Government work with relevant bodies and invest resources to support the development of a specialised "academic vocabulary" for certain school subjects (e.g., mathematics) including high-quality L1 teaching and learning materials, lesson plans, and instruction.

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²⁷ Bender, Penelope; Dutcher, Nadine; Klaus, David; Shore, Jane; Tesar, Charlie. 2005. In Their Own Language : Education for All. Education Notes. World Bank, Washington, DC. © World Bank.

²⁸ The World Bank (2021) Ibid 29 UNESCO 2012 ibid



"Children who are going to mainstream schools are being forced to leave their identity, culture and language at the door."

L. Gorey, First Cultural Educator, Children's Ground

The state of First Nations languages in Australia today

Australia has at least 120 First Nations languages still being spoken, with other languages under revival. Despite this, schooling has never been offered to First Nations children in their first languages as a primary language of instruction, with the exception of a few remote communities where local leaders have fought for this right.

Status of first languages

The Second National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS) in Australia found that more than 250 Indigenous Australian languages including 800 dialectal varieties were spoken on the continent at the time of European settlement in 1788.³⁰

The survey was undertaken in 2004/5 and again in 2014. Between that period 25 languages were lost. By 2014, of the 120 languages still being spoken, only 13 traditional Indigenous languages were considered 'strong' and still acquired by children. Approximately 100 languages are considered at severe risk or critically endangered. They are predominantly spoken by older generations, with many of these languages at risk as Elders pass away. With a movement to revive languages occurring, the survey found that some languages are being revitalised.

Table 2:

The status and change in First Nations language in Australia: key finding of the NILS surveys

NILS1 SURVEY (2004-2005)	NILS2 SURVEY (2014)		
About 145 were still spoken	About 120 were still spoken		
	Five are now in the moderately endangered group, while some languages from that group have moved into the severely/critically endangered category		
About 110 severely or critically endangered	About 100 languages that can be described as severely or critically endangered		
About 18 languages were strong, still spoken by all age groups and being passed on to children	About 13 can be considered strong, five fewer than in NILS1		
	30 or more languages showing significant increases in levels of use of language programs		

The survey found that some languages that are considered very strong are showing signs of decline. This is consistent with the ongoing concerns of Elders.

Dr M.K. Turner OAM was a celebrated Arrernte linguist, educator and Elder of the Arrernte Nation. While Arrernte is considered a strong language due to the presence of language speakers across generations, she and other Elders have been concerned about the decline in the use and integrity of the language over the past 30 years. With this loss, there is a loss of knowledge and law. This loss and degradation of language is of critical concern. It also shows the importance of understanding the state of each language from the perspective of the language users.

The NILS has strongly recommended government commitment to both structural and financial backing for the protection, revitalisation and maintenance of First Nations languages.

Elders note that languages never die; they rest, in the land, waiting. Across Australia, many First Nations people are reviving their languages and bringing them back into use.

First Nations communities across the country have worked tirelessly for over 50 years to maintain, document and revive their languages. Language revitalisation is currently being supported by the Australian Government Indigenous Languages and Arts program (ILA) and First Languages Australia; the peak body for First Nations languages in Australia (FLA), however the program is not adequately funded to achieve comprehensive revitalisation and strengthening of First Nations languages across Australia.

30 Marmion, D & Obata, K & Troy, J. (2014). Community, identity, wellbeing: the report of the Second National Indigenous Languages Survey; Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)

31 Devlin, B., Disbray, S., & Devlin, N. (Eds.) (2017). History of bilingual education in the Northern Territory: People, programs and policies. (Language Policy; Vol. 12). Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-2078-0

32 Devlin et al. ibid

How bilingual education in Australia affects First Nations language

While countries around the world have formally recognised indigenous education as part of mainstream educational offerings, this has not occurred in Australia.

First Nations epistemology continues to be oppressed and denied within Australian academic, knowledge and policy structures. The history of education post-colonisation began with the deliberate intent to achieve cultural genocide and transitioned to an enduring assimilationist approach that continues today.

The strongest movement towards First Nations-led and designed education was the significant bilingual movement in the 1970s. ³¹ This occurred at a similar time as immersion movements in other parts of the world. However, bilingual education in Australia lost government support and could not be established as a First Nations-led and designed offering within the Australian national system of education.

With its strongest foundations in the Northern Territory through the 1970s and 1980s, the bilingual schooling movements advanced the expertise of First Nations educators and the desire of First Nations people to manage our own education. Literacy production centres provided important learning resources. First Nations educators were keen to access Western teacher training; this led to a generation of First Nations teachers with expertise in their first culture and Western based educational skills.

Over the period, 31 bilingual schools were established. Bilingual education, however, came under constant criticism and pressure despite evidence that students performed slightly better than their peers in schools without formal bilingual programs. Bilingual programs also improved attendance. ³² Over several decades, bilingual education was structurally dismantled by both national and state/territory education policies.

Schools such as Yipirinya, Yirrkala bilingual school and Warlpiri schools in the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT) triangle all continued their practice and emerged as leaders in First Nations schooling. These three educational settings, along with Nyangatjatjara College and Children's Ground, continue to be leaders in the field of First Nations-led and designed education, privileging first language and culture. In Western Australia a movement of First Nations education led to the establishment of fourteen Aboriginal Independent Community Schools (AICS) in the Kimberley, Pilbara, Murchison, Goldfields and Great Southern areas. These schools deliver mainstream education "... in an environment where learning is nurtured by cultural identity, traditional language in many instances, and a sense of belonging to place." The Australian Independent Schools WA states that "... literacy results for students in these schools over the past decade are an obvious measure of their achievements."³³ Across Australia in recent years, there has been a movement to revitalise first culture and language of instruction with First Nations cultural-based educational settings emerging across the country.

Australia I First Nations education

Pre-1950s	1950s	1972	1973/74	1987-1997	2008	2021				
First language and culture continues to be taught within community as part of ongoing First Nations systems of learning										
Missionary schools	The first government schools were opened in the NT	Northern Territory Bilingual Education program included literacy production centres	Bilingual programs established elsewhere e.g., Aurukun Batchelor college trains a generation of qualified Western- trained First Nations teachers	Lack of support, resources commitment, policy 31 Bilingual school begin to decline in number	NT Minister for Education scrapped bilingual education	6 bilingual schools in NT with Yirrkala and WETT continuing as leaders				

14 Aboriginal Independent Schools in Western Australia are created

Increased inclusion of First Nation content in mainstream schools and development and inclusion of First Nations curriculum

> Children's Ground First Nations Apmerengentyele learning established; Nationally new programs and independent First Nations schools emerge centring First language and culture

Recommendation g Establish a comprehensive national network of First Nations Language and Literacy Centres for every Nation/language group.

Action: Resource a partnership between Utyerre Apanpe, the Australian Government Indigenous Languages and Arts program (ILA) and First Languages Australia (FLA) to establish a national network of First Nations Language and Literacy Centres, for every First Nations community/language group wishing to maintain, strengthen and revitalise their languages. These centres will support the new Apmerengentyele education system and mainstream education system by maintaining local Indigenous languages and creating learning resources.

Centres will be run by First Nations communities and/or appropriate local community-based First Nations organisations, delivering First Nations-led and designed learning (not within Western institutions).

Features of these centres include:

• They are led by local Elders and First Nations language experts and follows local priorities

• They create orthographies for languages where requested

• They develop quality language resources in oral, digital, written and other forms

• They are resourced to develop comprehensive whole-of-life and culture Learning and Teaching Materials (LTM) that are relevant to the context of the learner, culture and community

33 Aboriginal Independent Community Schools | AISWA. (2022). Aboriginal Independent Community Schools. https://www.ais.wa.edu.au/Aics

• They support the development of specialised "academic vocabulary" for certain school subjects (e.g., mathematics) including high-quality L1 teaching and learning materials, lesson plans, and instruction

• That there is adequate funding for resource development, archiving and libraries in both digital and hard copy format

• They develop a sharing and resource community plan, linking in with local schools and libraries

• Elders being required to be the senior governors of these centres and remunerated accordingly for their leadership

• Where community schools exist and are run by First Nations communities, the centres may be connected to these schools at the recommendation of community

• Language and Literacy centres for remote homelands may potentially incorporate a hub-and-spoke model to service and support each First Nations community, where a language is spoken across a number of communities.

Action: Resource Utyerre Apanpe as a National Language and Resource Development centre supporting local centres.

Action: National Language and Literacy Centres become literacy resource centres for early learning, schools and other educational programs/schools locally and nationally (First Nations and mainstream).



EVIDENCE OF FAILURE Impact of mainstream educational settings for First Nations students

First Nations children who succeed in the mainstream education system of Australia have done so in spite of the barriers they've faced. The cultural and personal harm experienced by many to achieve success in education is poorly understood.

For many First Nations children, simply getting through the school gate is a challenge. Once inside the gate, engaging in, enjoying and succeeding in their academic endeavours is met with multiple barriers. Barriers include an absence of culture safety in learning environments as well as the curriculum, which often reinforces racism and colonial dominance.

In their paper, "Toward an Australian culturally responsive pedagogy: a narrative review of the literature", Morrison, Rigney, Hattam, and Diplock highlight the failure of the current Australian education system for First Nations students. They prosecute the need for reform towards culturally responsive pedagogy within mainstream education, reviewing the international and national literature.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies were largely replaced with education systems transplanted from Anglo-**European contexts. Despite** considerable effort by **Aboriainal and Torres Strait** Islander peoples to remediate educational policy and practice, very little has changed. As a result of this systemic failure, there remains a stark and unremitting discrepancy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educational outcomes." 34

In 2019, Guenther et. al. published a comprehensive systemic review of the literature (the SRL) of First Nations education in Australia, reviewing over 10,000 papers. ³⁵

The SRL found a disconnect between the purpose and goals of education between the government and First Nations students and their parents. The research also demonstrated a disconnect between what counts as knowledge in the Australian Curriculum and what First Nations people consider to be critical knowledge.

The SRL emphasised the diverse First Nations that make up Australia and that educational design, content and delivery need to consider the "... uniqueness of particular sites including their histories, economies and location."

The review found racism was a prevalent force stating, "Empirical evidence demonstrates that racism negatively impacts experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and that these impacts are harmful, wide-reaching and life-long. They influence academic achievement, attitudes to language, emotional wellbeing, physical health, selfconcept, school attendance, post-school pathways, and eventually school choice and parental school engagement and the detrimental effects of racism on Indigenous student identities, self-esteem and success at school continues to be pervasiveness. Indigenous realities of colonisation, racism, and underachievement, highlight the presence of deeply embedded racist practices in schools, and must be of grave concern to all."

"Akaltye-arleanthemeye-teaching is a really sacred thing, because everything that we're learning is sacred. Nthakenhe amangkenhetyeke, to grow up, how to be, how to continue growing and learning in the right way through our lives."

Dr M.K. Turner OAM, Elder, Cultural Professor

³⁴ Morrison, A., Rigney, L-I., Hattam, R. & Diplock, A. (2019). Toward an Australian culturally responsive pedagogy: a narrative review of the literature. 2019: University of South Australia; ISBN: 978-1-922046-27-7

³⁵ Guenther, J., Harrison, N. & Burgess, C. Special issue. Aboriginal voices: Systematic reviews of indigenous education. Aust. Educ. Res. 46, 207-211 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-019-00316-4

Another striking finding was, since 2006, the SRL was unable to find evidence-based research to demonstrate success in learning outcomes. However, the SLR found that, when Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies are embedded in classroom learning through the genuine involvement of First Nations people, learning outcomes for both teachers and their students improved.

This SRL raises the serious question about power and control in education, cultural bias and racism and who should be leading policy, curriculum and standards for First Nations students. The review found there was repeated emphasis across the literature regarding the importance of local community control in education.

The focus on deficit and assimilation has been a hallmark of education policies in relation to First Nations students. Rather than looking at issues of systemic failure, the focus has been on 'fixing the child' who is failing in the system.

Funding and policies have focused on remedial learning programs (e.g., Direct Instruction) and 'off-country' solutions such as boarding schools. It can cost approximately \$50K per year per child to attend boarding schools (with fees, flights etc.). The focus on the child rather than the system of education continues to perpetuate this lack of access and equity. If the same funding was invested in local community-led schools, high-quality education could be created for every First Nations child. The evidence is clear-investment that prioritises first culture, language and the leadership of local communities improves education outcomes, protects language and culture and builds social and economic capital within the community.



Leading international evidence in relation to first language of instruction and cultural primacy in educational settings has largely been ignored in Australia. Where there has been inclusion, it has been placed as a component of the dominant Western education system (e.g., language classes and Learning On Country sessions) rather than in the design of education.

First Nations educators and academics have been calling for improved standards and practice within the mainstream education system for decades. Local governance, family inclusion, high expectations and culturally centered pedagogy for First Nations students are the foundation for success in any form of education, 36, 37, 38, 39

Progress in mainstream educational practices: **Examples of developments** to improve practices and standards.

While there are many challenges facing First Nations children in mainstream education, there has also been a movement amongst some educationalists, communities and education bodies to improve practices and standards. There has been increasing recognition and inclusion of the expertise of First Nations educational experts in a range of contexts. Some of these recent developments in relation to education, curriculum and teaching standards in Australia include (but are not limited to):

- First Languages Australia and the commitment of the Australian Government to first language teachers in Australian schools
- ACARA (the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority) has developed a framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages as part of the Australian curriculum
- The Northern Territory Indigenous Languages and Cultures Curriculum led by Indigenous educators from across the Northern Territory
- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) consultation and review of Indigenous cultural competency in the Australian teacher workforce to build and enhance the cultural competency of the existing teaching workforce and increase cultural safety in schools
- A growing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Independent Community Schools across Australia.

National education policy and reform that privileges First Nations people must be a priority. Without such reform, the continuation of disadvantage and deficit will be imprinted in the present and future generations of First Nations people.

There is a need for reform and investment in two components of the education system:

- Establishment of a First Nations-led and designed and led education system
- Improved cultural safety in mainstream education settings servicing First Nations children.

37 Sarra, C. (2012) Strong and Smart - Towards a Pedagogy for Emancipation Education for First Peoples, Routledge 50 Morrison, A., Rigney, L-I., Hattam, R. & Diplock, A. (2019). Toward an Australian culturally responsive pedagogy: a narrative review of the literature. 2019: University of South Australia; ISBN: 978-1-922046-27-7 38 Morrison, A., Rigney, L-I., Hattam, R. & Diplock, A. (2019). Toward an Australian culturally responsive pedagogy: a narrative review of the literature. 2019: University of

³⁶ McTurk, N; Nutton, G; Lea, T; Robinson, G; Carapetis, J. (2008); The School Readiness of Australian Indigenous Children: A Review of the literature; Charles Darwin University: Menzies School of Health Research

South Australia: ISBN: 978-1-922046-27-7 39 Stronger Smarter Institute Limited (2014). High-Expectations Relationships: a foundation for guality learning environments in all Australian schools. Stronger Smarter

Institute Limited Position Paper

CASE STUDY

EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS The Stronger Smarter Institute—in focus **

The Stronger Smarter Institute has been working with educators across remote, regional and metropolitan regions of Australia for over a decade to transform education for students in all classrooms. The Stronger Smarter Approach[™] is unique in the way it ensures a space of equal power—relating where community members, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education leaders, principals and teachers sit together in the Circle to create transformative change in Indigenous educational outcomes.

Since 2011, the Institute's ongoing work as a social enterprise with communities, organisations and schools shows that schools and organisations are continuing to seek support in engaging with their local communities. Traditionally, schools and organisations have thought of 'community engagement' as being directed and controlled internally, by inviting community members into the school or organisation to support existing structures, programs and decisions that have already been made. The Stronger Smarter Approach[™] focuses on genuine collaboration with communities and turns thinking towards a different and dynamic vision of community empowerment. In a community empowerment model, voices of community are privileged in all aspects of school and organisation planning, starting with decisions about what they see as quality outcomes for their children and families. These are authentic partnerships with community engaged in the whole process of conceptualisation, planning, enactment and evaluation—a shared two-way engagement.

The model recognises that Indigenous community members and Indigenous staff are articulate with powerful voices, and are seeking to engage in substantive, informed dialogue about educational issues, organisational practices and operations, and teaching and learning. Community engagement must be grounded in strong local connections and as an organisation-wide intervention where staff members learn more about local people and cultures, involving deep listening to understand different perspectives, experiences, beliefs and aspirations.

Investing in the community rather than the school or organisation is a cornerstone for sustainability as staff transfer in and out; the more remote the location, the higher the turnover. In the community empowerment model, school reform is a community driven process with community asking 'How will you work with us to achieve our vision for the future of our Jarjums?'. The long-standing powerlessness Aboriginal communities have felt in the education space and other service delivery as a result of colonial policy and practice can be ameliorated.



40 Stronger Smarter Institute (2017) Implementing the Stronger Smarter Approach. Stronger Smarter Institute Position Paper

Chapter 2: Response to Gonski and Closing the Gap

Two major reviews were undertaken by David Gonski to improve standards and achieve educational equity for all students in the Australian education system. ^{1,2}

Successive Closing the Gap reports show that educational outcomes for First Nations students are not on track in areas of school attendance and the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). In some indicators and jurisdictions, outcomes are worsening.

"In a school environment, **High-Expectations Relationships (H-ER) combine** the belief of high-expectations with the behaviours and dispositions needed to create a high-expectations learning environment. Teachers and school leaders need to develop quality relationships not just with students, but within the staffroom, with parents, and with the school community. Creating quality relationships and a high-expectations learning environment requires the establishment of high levels of trust and safety and the courage to challenge both oneself and others. Sarra (2011c) describes High-**Expectations Relationships** as being both firm and fair."

Dr M.K. Turner OAM, Elder, Cultural Professor

Gonski's review, Through Growth to Achievement: Report of The Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools, offered recommendations in five key areas:

- **1.** Laying the foundations for learning (early years)
- **2.** Equipping every student to grow and succeed in a changing world
- **3.** Creating, supporting and valuing a profession of expert educators
- 4. Empowering and supporting school leaders
- **5.** Raising and achieving ambitions through innovation and continuous improvement.

The recommendations across all areas provide a strong foundation for educational equity. However, <u>the barriers that are</u> <u>experienced by First Nations children were</u> <u>not fully addressed by the review and the</u> <u>review was limited to the existing educational</u> <u>system, with no discussion of First Nations</u> <u>educational practice.</u>

Australia's Closing the Gap data demonstrates First Nations children face persistent disadvantage within the education system despite significant efforts of governments over the past two decades. The 2023 Closing the Gap report shows educational outcomes for First Nations students are not on track and worsen as communities become more remote. First Nations children trail far behind non-Indigenous children in literacy, numeracy and writing skills. ² The Closing the Gap data shows that there has been no improvement in school attendance rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance in the five years to 2018.

The following is a response to each of the five areas presented in the Gonki review. It should be noted that the Gonski review offers important recommendations that should be supported, however they do not provide sufficient analysis or recommendations to achieve educational equity for First Nations students.

1. Laying the foundations for learning (early years)

The Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools noted the primary importance of investing in early childhood education and the benefit of early childhood opportunities for children who face vulnerability.

While research is clear that children from 'disadvantaged backgrounds' benefit from early years learning, there has been no research into the cultural risks of placing First Nations children in Western cultured learning environments. There is a risk that placing First Nations children in early years Western-designed learning environments creates a foundation for assimilation and dislocation from culture and identity at an early age.

Due to the deficit approach in policy and program design, the leading practice of First Nations early childhood approaches are poorly understood. Early Childhood Education and Care must be designed and run by First Nation people.

First Nations early childhood practices create a foundation that equips our children to be independent, multilingual, creative thinkers who are connected to their responsibilities to the land and to people. This is the formative time of development and it is when their cultural identity is embedded. It is where their language develops and their understanding of the world around them evolves.

It is critical that children are surrounded by learning environments that reflect and privilege their language and their culture in their earliest years. Research shows that learning in first language—mother language cements the ability to learn second and third languages.

First Nations early childhood practices are consistent with recommendations as presented in the *Through Growth to Achievement* review, including services that are localised, place-based and offer a comprehensive integrated services response for children to address the diverse needs and contexts across Australia. First Nations systems of early learning include strong standards for safety, are intergenerational, placed on Country and culturally responsive to our children.

A national First Nations early years learning system supporting language, cultural immersion and pedagogy should be resourced and accessible for every First Nation group in Australia. The central recommendations of this report is for the establishment of the Apmerengentyele education system. This begins in early childhood. The recommendations in this report provide the cultural, learning and care standards that would allow each Nation to develop, deliver and govern the learning and care of their children in the early years.

 Stronger Smarter Institute Limited (2014). High-Expectations Relationships: a foundation for quality learning environments in all Australian schools. Stronger Smarter Institute Limited Position Paper

^{1.} Gonski, D., Boston, K., Greiner, K., Lawrence, C., Scales, B., & Tannock, P.

 ^{(2011).} Review of funding for schooling: Final report. Australian Government
Australian Government (2018). Through Growth to Achievement. The Report of The Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools. Canberra: Department of Education and Training.

2. Equipping every student to grow and succeed in a changing world

For children to learn and succeed at school, they need to enter educational environments that reflect them. They need to feel safe and accepted. Ensuring content reflects the learner and is responsive to a child's identity and culture is necessary. Ensuring learning is relevant to the economic, social and cultural realities and opportunities both locally and globally is critical. Equipping First Nations students to succeed in a changing world requires a range of structural reforms in education. Having quality educators is critical and having an effective language of instruction is critical.

National assessment and reporting must include insight into a student's learning, growth and achievements against both their first culture and western learning outcomes, making requisite provision for children being assessed in English when it is their second language. It is essential that the teaching of First Nations students does not align with a deficit model. Adjustments to the system rather than the student are required to ensure First Nations students are succeeding in a robust learning environment that will equip them for life. Although over the past ten years the Australian Curriculum has developed to include learning areas and general capabilities better targeted to the cultural and other learning priorities of First Nations students, we have a long way to go before First Nations children truly excel in education that is culturally safe. 4, 5, 6

Reimagining education and teaching skills for the future creates exciting opportunities to bridge gaps in educational access and quality through digital offerings. This has the potential to transform remote area learning to bring teachers and universities into nearly any home and any remote or regional community. The global pandemic has evidenced the ability to reconfigure economies, education and businesses to engage from home environments. This presents a pathway for new skills to emerge for First Nations communities, regardless of remoteness and population level. The vision for these remote communities is that any First Nations child can access the highest quality education, no matter where they live.

Review to Achieve Educational Excellence recommends a review of secondary education content is produced, to give young people the best preparation for their future. This is critical for First Nations students where secondary learning outcomes are not on track to Close the Gap, and where outcomes worsen the more remotely children live.

As First Nations people, we want our children to learn and uphold their cultural responsibilities and knowledge.

We also want them to have the skills and choice to:

- engage in employment
- establish businesses
- further their education through universities or other avenues.

We endorse the statement from *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence*:

"There is an opportunitu to consider a broader reconceptualisation of schools... as a gateway into the real world... where schools act not just as education providers, but as service hubs offering a multitude of experience... In the future, a typical week in the life of a senior secondary student could involve an internship for two days, a mathematics course via distance learning on another day, and two days attending a local school for more traditional learning."

First Nations learning systems and pedagogy must be part of reconceptualising schools, and lifting the ceiling of what is possible in educational delivery within our communities. Recognising the cultural strengths, knowledge, skills and learnings that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people experience beyond the scope of a traditional mainstream school needs to be formally recognised as a part of their senior secondary pathway. The engagement of digital technologies to expand access, quality and opportunity, combined with First Nations practice, provides an exciting foundation for what the future of education can look like.

To ensure that First Nations students have a 'gateway to the world', their learning journey must include:

- First cultural knowledge and language centred in their learning
- Cultural roles and responsibilities
- Local political, social and cultural history
- Australian political history and context including truth telling and human rights
- Financial and economic systems
- Social and emotional wellbeing
- Health and physical education
- Creative arts
- Cross curricular opportunities
- Knowledge in Western and global domains
- Skills and knowledge that can bridge opportunities to new emerging and dynamic global workforce environments.

Secondary schooling environments must be culturally safe and protect cultural standards and relational responsibilities including but not limited to:

- Avoidance relationships (there are cultural laws based on kinship)
- Protocols and teaching adjustments required to meet the respective needs of boys and men (students who have been through customary law) within education settings
- The right for each Nation and community to determine cultural standards for their children.

The Gonski review promotes the importance of community and family engagement in learning success for students. Movements in progressive learning at an international level have been led by countries such as Finland and educational thought leaders such as those contributing to The Future of Education and Skills 2030 project for the OECD who are asking the question:

"How can we prepare students for jobs that have not yet been created, to tackle societal challenges that we can't yet imagine, and to use technologies that have not yet been invented? How can we equip them to thrive in an interconnected world where they need to understand and appreciate different perspectives and world views, interact respectfully with others, and take responsible action towards sustainability and collective well-being?" ⁷

Our First Nations learning systems have evolved for over 65,000 years and hold leading practice that others are only now coming to understand and value. Our systems are not prescribed by a location or hours of the day, and they are not dependent on a 'studentteacher' primary relationship. Learning is necessarily integrated across generations and connect the person not only to knowledge but a responsibility for that knowledge. Our systems of learning are designed to achieve and answer the questions being posed by the OECD.

- Morrison, A., Rigney, L-I., Hattam, R. & Diplock, A. (2019). Toward an Australian culturally responsive pedagogy: a narrative review of the literature. 2019: University of South Australia; ISBN: 978-1-922046-27-7
- Guenther, J., Harrison, N. & Burgess, C. Special issue. Aboriginal voices: Systematic reviews of indigenous education. Aust. Educ. Res. 46, 207-211 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-019-00316-4
- Perso, T.F. (2012) Cultural Responsiveness and School Education: With particular focus on Australia's First Peoples; A Review & Synthesis of the Literature. Menzies School of Health Research, Centre for Child Development and Education, Darwin Northern Territory.
- 7 https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/contact/thought-leaders

3. Creating, supporting and valuing a profession of expert educators

A high-quality teaching profession is essential and the recommendations by *Through* Growth to Achievement are critical in sustaining the profession and recognising the importance and expertise of our teachers. When considering the profession of expert educators, there are two categories of educators required for successful First Nations education:

- First cultural educators trained in First Nations-led and designed education
- First Nations educators trained in Western education.

First cultural educators trained in **First Nations-led and designed education**

First cultural educators can only be First Nations people recognised and authorised within their own communities. It is critical that the standards and decision making are retained at a community level and not overtaken or assumed by government. First cultural educators do not necessarily have a Western qualification as their qualification is determined by the community.

First Nations education systems come from the land and through complex systems of kinship and knowledge sharing. For example, educational roles include:

- Elders
- Cultural educators
- Content specialists
- Relational authority for areas and places of knowledge.

Professional development occurs through Elders and knowledge holders passing knowledge to senior cultural educators and next generation educators. First cultural educators need to be recognised and remunerated within the education systems, consistent with their authority and expertise as defined by their communities. First cultural educators are the only practitioners who can achieve Culturally Empowered (CE) learning environments.⁸ CE learning environments are the highest level of standards that can be achieved.

First Nations educators trained in Western education

First Nations people are under-represented in the Western trained teaching profession. This relates to:

- Inadequate pathways, particularly for those living in remote and regional areas
- Poor remuneration due to a history of employment through Community **Development Employment Projects and** a lack of commitment to pay equity
- Lack of skills recognition and the regular positioning of First Nations people as teacher assistants without recognition of cultural, linguistic and teaching skills
- Teacher training that is lacking in cultural responsiveness and safety
- A poor understanding of colonised practices and racism
- 'Burn out' of Western-trained First Nations teachers
- Lack of ongoing professional development for First Nations teachers.

In the Northern Territory during the 1980s and 90s, there was a comprehensive pathway into Western teacher training for First Nations people, led by First Nations educational institutions, that resulted in a strong representation of First Nations people qualified with Western teaching certificates, diplomas and degrees. These pathways have diminished over the past twenty years despite positive efforts of projects such as the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative.⁹

Significant workforce issues, both within First Nations communities and in education more broadly, can be resolved through recognition, remuneration, training and opportunity for local First Nations educators.

4. **Empowering and** supporting school leaders

Empowering and supporting school leaders begins with ensuring First Nations people are leading their educational systems. Collective First Nations governance systems are well placed to lead effective educational delivery. We lead together in a distinctive leadership style and action that fits with our ways of being and doing. This style enhances the educational outcomes of all. Our First Nations families should be central to any school where our children are learning.

In 2018, Utyerre Apanpe was convened for the first time. This is a national network of First Cultural educators, including Elders and leaders in mainstream educational systems. Utyerre Apanpe members strongly advocate for a system of education run and governed by First Nations people, through First Nations cultural learning systems, to be established with the support of Government. This will empower First Nations leadership across the Australian education system.

"We didn't go to Cherbourg and give the children a sense of being 'Strong and Smart'... That was inside them already... That sense of being strong and smart resides in every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child." 14

Dr Chris Sarra

8. Children's Ground has defined the standard that Culturally Empowered (CE) learning environments are the highest standard and can only be achieved when led by teaching in western dominated environments where students of other cultures are being taught.

- The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education. 49. 1-14. 10.1017/jie.2018.10.) 11. Kukutai, T and Taylor, J. (2016) Indigenous Data Sovereignty Toward an agenda; CAEPR Research Monograph No. 38 ANU Press
- 12. AIATSIS (2020) AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research; Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)

5. **Raising and achieving** ambitions through innovation and continuous improvement

As stated in Through Growth to Achievement, "The best education systems encourage innovation and improvement in schools over the long term."

First Nations leaders and educators have long been awaiting standards of excellence to be invested in their communities. Professor Chris Sarra has advocated for high expectations in First Nations education as a key to engaging students and improving outcomes since 2008. He has challenged deficit approaches and the system to recognise the ability and need for high expectations relationships and personalised approaches to learning to adequately meet students' needs. ¹⁰

Innovation and quality is enabled by robust research and evaluation. However, research into First Nations education is dominated by Western-trained academics and a cultural worldview that is foreign to First Nations people. This view does not help us achieve our ambitions.

Not only do First Nations people need to design and lead education, we need to lead the research and evaluation of our educational systems. First Nations researchers can uphold the standards and codes of ethics for research and data sovereignty. This will ensure cultural rights and evaluation integrity. ^{11, 12, 13}

We can review our performance by conducting our own research, using our cultural and global educational standards. We will better understand the barriers and drivers to success and strive for excellence. As we focus on quality we will see the continuous improvements and ongoing development of First Nations-led and designed education in Australia.

First Cultural educators within a context where the First culture is prioritised. Cultural safety and culturally responsive practice are standards for teachers who are

^{9.} Johnson, P., Cherednichenko, B., & Rose, M. (2016, March). Evaluation of the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teacher Initiative Project. MATSITI. 10. Sarra, C & Spillman, D & Jackson, C & Davis, J & Bray, J. (2018). High-Expectations Relationships: A Foundation for Enacting High Expectations in all Australian Schools.

^{13.} Walter, M and Andersen C. (2013) nayri kati ("Good Numbers")-Indigenous Quantitative Methodology in Practice; Routledge

^{14.} Stronger Smarter Institute. (2020). Stronger Smarter: A strength-based approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Stronger Smarter Institute position paper

Recommendation Develop and support a First Nations education workforce.

In order for a First Nations-led and designed education system to be developed, there must be a recognition of First Nations educators within their own cultural authority (First Cultural educators).

Action: The Australian Government to work with Federal and State/Territory education departments and Utyerre Apanpe to develop a framework and guidelines for First Cultural Educators, covering standards, expertise, development, training and practice.

This work will include:

• A comprehensive First Nations education workforce strategy to be developed and led by First Nations educators from early years to secondary schooling

• Attraction, retention, recognition and remuneration of First Nations educators with recognition of cultural and linguistic skills

• Agreed standards in First Cultural teaching.

Action: Improve pathways for First Nations people engaged in Western educational teacher training by:

• The government, with First Nations training bodies nationally, reviewing and investing in teacher training pathways for First Nations people with a targeted strategy for remote and regional First Nations people

• Reviewing and rectifying all 'teacher assistant' positions where significant numbers of staff are neither paid equitably for their skills nor paid for professional development or annual leave within the education system

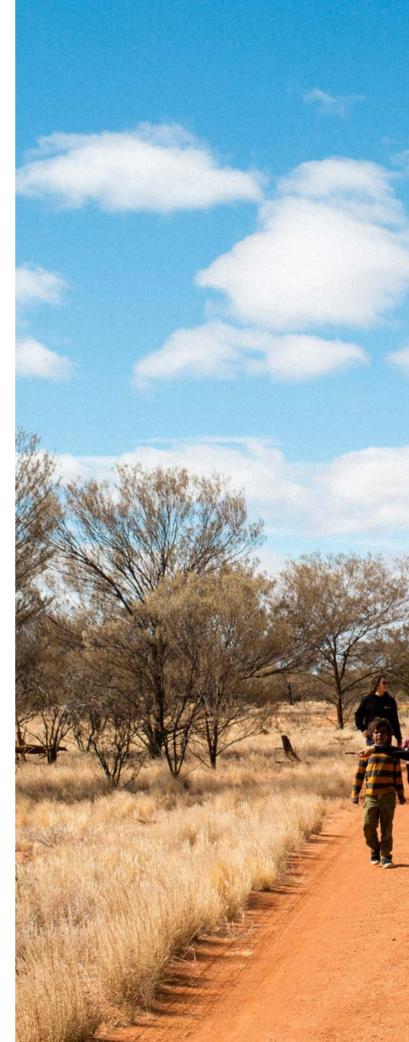
• Establish standards for adequate cultural protections, inclusions and authorities for First Cultural educators in mainstream schooling

• Improved teacher training in culturally responsive pedagogy and practice

• Improved teacher training through programs including the Stronger, Smarter Institute

• Focusing on new expert areas including First Nations knowledge areas and emerging specialist areas (such as climate change) to engage and build First Nations specialist teachers

• Resourcing Utyerre Apanpe to work with AITSIL and ACARA in relation to training, curriculum and the attraction, retention, pathways and recognition of First Nations educators.





Chapter 3: Akaltye: Our Education, Our Way

How we teach: towards national reform and a First Nations-led and designed education system

other and the land. We We have our education system. We have always want to continue our learning system. We want this recognised taught our children. We are the oldest educators and we want to lead in the world. We have a way of teaching-our this in our communities. pedagogy. We teach We want our children to our children through grow up as First Nations our world view, our people. We also want epistemology. Across them to learn about the Australia, there are Western way. We want first cultural educators them strong in culture in every First Nations and identity and knowing community. Our and understanding the teaching connects to world around them. our law, our people, our As community leaders land, our history and and educators, it is our responsibility to make our future. We don't just teach knowledge; sure our children have all we teach how to be in the knowledge and skills the world. We teach they need for life. We have been saying this about our roles and responsibilities to each for many, many years.

Akaltye-arle-anthemeye, teaching is a really sacred thing. Akaltye-irrenheke, constantly learning; arintyeke, seeking it as forever ongoing; imerneheke, being shown continuously. That is how it was and is.¹

Turner, M.K. Iwenhe Tyerrtye: What it Means to Be an Aboriginal Person, compiled by Barry McDonald, translations by Veronica Perrurle Dobson (IAD Press, 2010)

CURRENT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FIRST NATIONS AND WESTERN KNOWLEDGE

While we have recognised the government's education system, the government have not recognised ours. Many of us are trained in Western teaching. The government wants us to fit into their system. They don't see our system. They seek our advice to improve their education systems, thinking this is the only way forward. But we cannot fix the government system. It is not made for us. This is why mainstream education is not working for our children.

Educational leaders from different Nations have presented the relationship between First Nations and Western knowledge and practice in many ways over many years. The idea of a 'meeting' place for learning between and through cultures is a consistent theme. This has been presented in visual and written communications.

Figure 2:

Jannette McCormack, Altyere Nwernekenhe. This painting was originally provided for A Share in the Future–Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory in 2014²

"Altyere is the spiritual connection to the world. Nwernekenhe means 'ours'. The painting represents the shields of knowledge: the Indigenous worldview and the Western worldview. The centre of the painting is where the learning is taking place."

Jannette McCormack, Altyere Nwernekenhe

Figure 3:

Lagoon where Ganma process occurs. Marika. R. (1999). Dr Marika (dec) was a celebrated Yolnu leader and educator. She provided a range of papers and presentations to highlight and share the importance of Yolnu knowledge and practice in education. The following is a diagram and description that she presented in her work. Marika says, "Water is often taken to represent knowledge in Yolnu Philosophy. What we see happening in the school is a process of knowledge production where we have two different cultures, Balanda and Yolnu, working together. Both cultures need to be presented in a way where each one is preserved and respected. The metaphor for shared by the Yolnu people is that of the Ganma-the lagoon where the salt water and the fresh water interminale." 3

Figure 4:

The Third Cultural Space. Dr John Davis presented the third cultural space in 2008.⁴ "The third cultural space recognises that Indigenous communities have distinct and deep cultural and worldviews-views that differ from those found in most Western education systems. When Western and Indigenous systems are acknowledged and valued equally, the overlapping or merging of views represents a new way of educating." 5

"In the diagram, the black circle represents Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, and the red circle represents Western ways. Within the third cultural space, the relationship is built on valuing strengths, holding high expectations, and deep listening to understand the perspectives, expectations, hopes and aspirations of others. This is the starting point to creating a learning space of positive cultural identity, belonging and participation where Jarjums can continue to build the resilience and socio-emotional skills they need for the future."6

2 Wilson B. (2014) A Share in the Future: Review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory; Northern Territory Government

3 Marika, R. (1999). Milthun latju wanga romgu Yolu: Valuing Yolu knowledge in the education system. Ngoonjook: A Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues, 16 (December), 107-120

4 Queensland Government 2011; Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in schools A guide for school learning communities

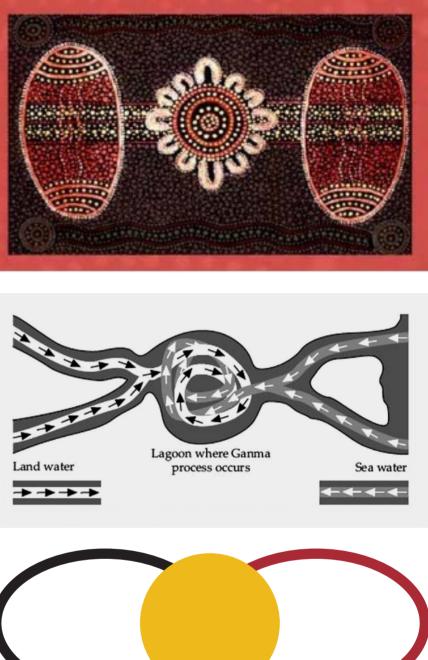
5 Stronger Smarter Institute Limited (2020). A mesh of High-Expectations Relationships across transitions in the Early Years? Stronger Smarter Institute Limited

6 Stronger Smarter Institute Limited (2020) ibid

3.

4.

2.



There has been much written about the relationship between First Nations and Western knowledge including Dr Elizabeth Marrkilyi Giles Ellis's book, *In the Time of their Lives; 'wangka kutjupa-kutjuparringu*': how talk has changed in the Western Desert. ⁷ Dr Elizabeth Marrkilyi Giles Ellis is a Ngaatjatjarra woman, linguist and educator and author whose life's work speak to the foundations of lore, culture and life that underpin language and learning in the Western Desert region.

Dr Marika led this discussion in the *Leaching the Poison* paper. Marika says, "One of the challenges that we face today is we have to balance between two worlds. That of what the Western society imposes on us, and that of our own beliefs. Our system of existence has embraced and reinvented ourselves time and time again. We want the opportunity to measure our progress and successes ourselves, without that disempowerment from the top down. We have adapted and changed our lifestyles in order to foster and embrace the changing structures and processes in our society. But where is the compromise from the Ngapaki people in power?" ⁸

For many years, across many languages and Nations, we've presented our expertise, our advice and our priorities regarding education. We've worked with our communities and we have worked with governments. We have shared our culture and our knowledge and we have provided direction regarding the priorities for our children and the way education is best designed. Our contributions can be found in conferences, workshops, inquiries, reviews, papers, books, films and paintings. This now needs to be seen in a new system of education, led by us.

7. Kral, I. and Ellis, L., 2020, In the time of their lives: Wangka kutjupa-kut uparringu: How talk has changed in the Western Desert; UWA Publishing

 Marika, R., Yunupingu, Y., Marika-Mununggiritj, R., & Muller, S. L. (2009). Leaching the poison - The importance of process and partnership in working with Yolngu. Journal of Rural Studies, 25(4), 404 413. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2009.05.007
Excerpt from Leaching the Poison, written by Dr. Raymattja

 Excerpt from Leaching the Poison, written by Dr. Rayn Marika-Mununggiritj

CASE STUDY

Educating the First Nations way: First Nations pedagogy and laws: Yolŋu example '

In Yirrkala, Yolŋu educators have provided decades of expertise to the field of education.

Leaching the Poison is a paper that speaks powerfully to the integrity of Yolŋu education, values, law and pedagogy and danger when governments fail to respect Yolŋu culture. It presents how education process, design and decision-making are critical.

Yolŋu discuss decision-making structures and power as being equitable and reciprocal. This decision-making process is similar across many First Nations. Decision-making structures protect equity between clans, genders and land groups. Decision-making is represented by a circle in comparison to the pyramid structure of Western decision-making, reflecting inclusiveness rather than hierarchy.

Excerpt from *Leaching the Poison*, written by Dr Raymattja Marika-Mununggiritj

"Yambirrpa is an ancient practice and catching fish is the literal meaning for this process, but the metaphor has a deeper meaning for our lives. The rocks represent people in their role as Elders in the community. All of the fish caught in the middle are our children, our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren. When the tides go out, the fish stay there, the children stay to be protected by their Elders. It is within the Yambirrpa that they will learn, where the Elders come together to teach the future generations and encourage them to become independent. Sometimes there are big storms that come from the outside which break or fragment the Yambirrpa. When that happens,

we need to work together as a community to build it and mend it by putting more rocks in place. It represents unification, working together to guide young people into Yolŋu foundations for learning.

Ngathu the cycad nut and Yambirrpa, the fish trap. Ngathu identifies the need for right process, to make sure that the cyanide is leached from the cycad nut so it can be prepared into sacred bread. If decision making, like the ngathu, has not gone through the right processes, the poison will remain. Yambirrpa is about working together in partnership because if one of the rocks in the fish trap is removed, the fish will escape.

There are many ways that government processes erode our own governance structures and allow the fish to escape... Western knowledge and constitutions can fill the gaps, but the Yolŋu foundation must be kept strong and decisions must be in the hands of the right people.

We urge governments to stop giving us the cycad nut with the cyanide trapped in it, we need the autonomy to leach the poison. We need the cleansing affect, the water, the time for healing and dealing with issues in our community.

Let your fragmented law See that our law is one with land and sea Let our law be institutionalised and be Recognised with yours Leach the poison out Let it be cleansed." "I must teach in a way that keeps the knowledge alive, and makes the students feel that once I have shared my knowledge with them, then they are in a way obligated to me, that we have responsibilities together, which come from the knowledge we have shared together."

Dr Marika-Mununggiritj, 1991

First Nations pedagogy is founded on reciprocity, inclusion and the right people teaching and speaking for the right areas of knowledge. Teaching is about reciprocity and relationships. Western educational leaders speak about the importance of relationships between the teacher and the student; similarly, this relationship is at the heart of learning for First Nations people. For First Nations people, the relationship between the student, the land, their kinship and their law are at the heart of learning. Teaching is not only about the learning of facts, skills or a way of thinking; it is about understanding the responsibility for the knowledge that you have gained and ensuring you use this knowledge in the right way.

With First Nations people, there is a mutual respect and law. The right people must talk for the right situation. It comes from the law of the land and Elders are an authority. Marika explains, "Yolŋu cannot just go onto somebody's land and make decisions for other people's country... We have to talk to the right people for the right place."

Communal decision making is the way of First Nations people. Marika explains, "The right people ...come in their own time to talk. Time is flexible. Disagreements are discussed, often in family groups, there is not one person making the decisions... Ensuring the right people are involved and have the chance to negotiate their position is part of getting the processes right."

An Example of a First Nations Worldview: Apmerengentyele: the Arrernte worldview from which educational, health, legal, governance and social systems arise.

First Nations learning begins at birth and continues through life to Eldership. Elders hold the ultimate authority as 'professors' and all other generations are on a continual learning path.

Each language and Nation have a word that encompasses our worldview—our law, knowledge, epistemology. For Warlpiri it is called the Jukurrpa, for Pitjantjatjara it is called the Tjukurrpa, for Arrernte it is the Altyerre. These knowledge systems have been taught through practice and oral transmission for over 65,000 years. It is not possible to write down the complexity of our systems. However, over the past fifty years, we have shared key foundations to strengthen our partnerships with Western educators.

Dr M.K. Turner OAM authored the book, *Iwenhe Tyerrtye: What it Means to Be an Aboriginal Person.* ¹⁰ The book presents the Arrernte worldview, law, learning and life course. In more recent years she has articulated the laws, knowledge and practice that underpin learning for Arrernte people into Apmerengentyele. It is the worldview from which educational, health, legal, governance and social systems arise. It is from this that Arrernte people draw curriculum and pedagogy.

Dr M.K. Turner's image, Apmerengentyele (right), presents an Arrernte worldview, with key areas that are shared across many First Peoples. Apmerengentyele means from the land.

Figure 5:

Apmerengentyele¹¹

Apmerengentyele is our guiding framework– for education and for life. From this, our curriculum is derived, our laws are created, our society is held, our responsibilities are established, and our cultures are sustained. Through this, we know where we belong, our identity, our connection, our history and our future. Elders, like Dr M.K. Turner, hold our evolving knowledge systems that are the most sustained in the world. With over 65,000 years of practice and expertise, this is the foundation of our education system as First Peoples. There is sacredness that sits behind Apmerengentyele.

Imagine a library of the greatest standing in the world that holds the detailed knowledge of the oldest civilisations in the world—this is held by our Elders. This was held by Dr M.K. Turner OAM. Apmerengentyele is a gift, a direction and a guide to how we must learn, live and respect to protect our children, our languages, our cultures and the earth.

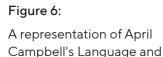
"We've got our own language and teaching standards in our own ways for our children. Every nation of people have got their own teaching methods and qualifications. We teach by our own knowledge and our own training with our own minds in our own homeland."

Dr M.K. Turner, OAM 2018 Children's Ground Annual Report

10 Turner, M.K. Iwenhe Tyerrtye: What it Means to Be an Aboriginal Person, compiled by Barry McDonald, translations by Veronica Perrurle Dobson (IAD Press, 2010) 11 Apmerengentyele, Dr M.K. Turner OAM



5.



Culture framework. April Campbell, an Anmatyere senior educator, articulated this cultural framework for learning at an Utyerre Apanpe forum. She was a critical expert in the development of The Northern Territory Indigenous Languages and Cultures Curriculum.



Translating First Nations Frameworks into Curriculums

When we think about education, our responsibility is to our ancestors and our Elders and to our land and our people—to our Jukurrpa/Tjukurrpa/Altyerre. We translate Apmerengentyele into our curriculum. In every Nation, our Elders are the knowledge holders and we teach through their authority. We have many first cultural educators. Some are also trained in Western teaching.

There is a long history of celebrated First Nations people who have led education in our communities, working with governments and others to have our learning recognised. Yirrkala Bilingual school, Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT), Yipirinya School and Nyangatjatjara College are just some leaders in First Nations education over the past 50 years.

Each language group has defined their curriculum through their culture. At Yirrkala, Galtha Rom is the cultural curriculum that is used. Warlpiri educators have shared the template, Ngurra-kurlu. ¹² <u>It presents five key</u> elements of Warlpiri culture: Land (Country), Law, Language, Ceremony and Skin (Kinship). <u>These elements are critical knowledge</u> <u>pathways</u>. Ngurra-kurlu is also 'the feeling of a common sense of belonging' and ensures young people feel and know who they are, where they belong and what it means to be Warlpiri.

12 Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu WJ, Holmes M and Box L. 2008. Ngurra-kurlu: A way of working with Warlpiri people, D KCRC Report; Desert Knowledge CRC, Alice Springs 13 Marika et al. ibid (2009)

Despite the efforts of First Nations educators, we have received little support and often faced challenges when attempting to exercise our right to deliver education through our first languages and cultures. In independent Aboriginal schools and some community schools, First Nations educators have led education. However education is mostly run by the government systems, through government curriculum, standards and forces. Even in government schools with strong First Nations leadership, there is an ongoing desire for more support, respect and independence.

The solution was clearly articulated by Dr Marika, who has said "The aovernment needs to change their laws and their views to recognise us, the First Australians, as a people with rights to control our own destinies and affairs. They have to stop creating confusion, uncertaintu and stop thinking negatively because it is discriminatory. We all want to create a positive future for Yolngu children, but we, as Yolngu know better. The solution lies within us, the Yolnau community, not in 'answers' being imposed on us. We need the autonomu to leach the poison out of the process." 13



Recommendation g Australian governments commit to the establishment of a new First Nations education system.

Action: The Australian Government, with agreement by the States and Territories, enacts policy and legislation to establish a new arm of the Australian education system: a First Nations-led and designed Apmerengentyele learning system that is founded on first culture and language.

This reform will recognise:

a. First Nations systems of education as critical to the learning outcomes and wellbeing of First Nations children

b. First Nations learning spanning early childhood, childhood (primary aged), young people (secondary aged), young men and women (recognised through customary law and still in secondary age) and tertiary learning

c. First Nations educators recognised within First Nations communities including Elders and senior cultural practitioners as the key advisors on the reform with Government oversighted by Utyerre Apanpe

d. Requisite federal funding to establish First Nations-led and designed learning systems enabling First Nations communities to establish and govern the learning of their children and families

e. The need to properly resource research and evaluation, led by community, to ensure delivery of high-quality learning.

This reform will re-establish First Nations educational practice through First Nations laws and governance in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and standards recognised by both UNESCO and the World Bank. This requires the leadership of Elders and cannot be controlled by a national body selected by the government. It is however essential for the Australian Government to lead the establishment of this new arm of education in order to achieve national reform.

Federal legislation will allow First Nations communities to establish and govern our own schools through First Nations pedagogy and practice based on Apmerengentyele.

The result will be three offerings for the First Nations children and families within the Australian education system:

- 1. First Nations Education
- **2.** First Nations education within Western Education System
- 3. Western Education.



Chapter 4: First Nations education in practice Ampe-Kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground)



Children's Ground is a national First Nations organisation changing the status quo.

The Children's Ground Approach is designed, delivered, governed and evaluated by local First Nations people. It aims to achieve national systemic change, justice and long-term wellbeing for future generations.

Apmerengentyele is at the heart of Children's Ground.

Here we are leading education, Our Way.

This is our voice.

The Children's Ground Approach (CG Approach) is a 25-year strategy to achieve systemic and enduring change by addressing the key economic, social, cultural and political drivers that create and sustain complex and extreme inequity.

Children's Ground is evidencing a whole of community, in community approach. It is a bottom-up system, directed and delivered by First Nations communities. It understands that each community has a unique cultural, land, governance, language and kinship structure. In practice and strategy, Children's Ground is informed by local knowledge and experiences as well as international and national evidence and leading practice.

The Children's Ground Approach includes ten principles for practice, an integrated service platform and five key areas for systems reform. These are modelling a new system to achieve long term impact. The Children's Ground Learning and Wellbeing approach is at the centre of systems reform.

Children's Ground is being led by nations and language groups in the Northern Territory in Central Australia, West Arnhem Land and Darwin.

The re-visioning of Learning

Children's Ground's education reform is underpinned by Apmerengentyele, ensuring key learning outcomes maintain a First Nations world view.

The Children's Ground Learning and Wellbeing approach centres First Nations epistemology and pedagogy and recognises these as leading practice and the oldest system of education in the world. Cultural knowledge systems and identity are the foundations for success in a child's learning journey. Learning is seen as a life journey for each child, in the context of their families, their communities and broader society.

The aim is to create a system that honours children, where they can be confident and engaged learners, who experience cultural security and through their learning journey develop the skills and opportunities for lifelong learning, economic independence and cultural, social and emotional wellbeing. Children's Ground is inspired by the international movement in immersion educational systems and the many Elders who have been holding and maintaining First Nations learning systems. We have built upon their achievements.

First Nations leaders of Children's Ground have been involved in education and linguistics for many years. This experience includes founders, board members and practitioners (teachers) of First Nations educational institutions for both children and adults.

Many of us working at Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground) have worked in this this area for over 40 years and we are passionate about our children's education, health and wellbeing. We have had a big struggle trying to get the importance of learning first languages and culture recognised within the Western education system. In the 80's we developed our own curriculum. We have made many attempts to see this recognised but the mainstream education system has not supported us. When our children go to mainstream schools, their Aboriginal identity is left outside the classroom. When they walk out the door that's when they pick up their identity. You've got to have your identity to learn. That's why Children's Ground is really important: we need our kids to grow up learning in their language and in a place where their identity is strong.

At Children's Ground, we decided we couldn't wait any longer. Now we are delivering our learning our way and we are seeing our children grow and learn. We are in our early stages. We have begun in early childhood and emerging into early primary and will continue to grow and deliver our system of learning through the learning journey or our children.

We are seeing our children learning through their languages and culture, as well as learning key western educational skills. Our system of education is coming back to life and it is working. It is working for our children, for our families and for our culture.

Figure 7: (right)

Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe: design - Jane Davis, painting - Amunda Gorey.



7.

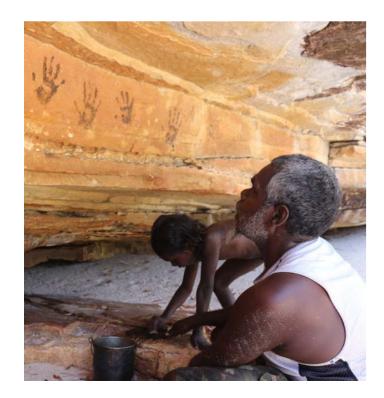
"The children are learning. They sit in the middle, learning from adults and Elders. It is like a fire. Their footprints walk in and out to family and community. Our footprints strengthen each family and each community and everywhere there is learning. The generations are together, in our cycle of learning, responsibility and growth. Our children grow and they graduate (four outside circles) to new pathways and work and their footprints always come back to the heart of where they belong."

Children's Ground Leadership and Governance

"The land, the people, the story-that's our governance."

Dr M.K. Turner, OAM

First Nations governance and leadership is at the heart of Children's Ground. recognising the roles of Elders, Traditional Owners, local community leaders, families and children. In each community, local authorities lead Children's Ground. In Central Australia Ingkerrekele Arntarnte-areme is the name of our Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe Governance Committee. It means everyone being responsible.



Tuerrtue Arrernte mapele iwerre ineme. Anwerne angkentyele ileme nthakenhe mpwaretyeke. Arrpenhele iletyeke arranakwe. Anwerne apurte-irremele decision mpwareme, tyerrtye mape akwete anakeme community-ke ante itne ileme involved-irretyeke. Anwerne apurte-irremele alakenhe mpwareme. Anwernenhe aweme. Arrantherre, tyerrtye mperikere mapele aweme. Anwerneke amparre arrwekele arrernele ante iterrentye anwernekenhe awetyeke.

Community is making the decisions and leading: Arrernte people are leading the way. We are always talking to community and getting people involved. We are making the decisions. No one is telling us what to do. We're all doing it together.

Akngerre-parte mape involve-irreme and itne iwerre imerneme. Anwerneke artweye mape akaltyele antheke akngerre-parte mapele, anwerne ampe ingkernenye mape mwantyele akaltyele anthetyeke, arntarnte aretyeke ante itele-aretyeke nthakenhe itne anwerne akaltyele antheke.

Elders are involved and leading: Knowledge from the old people being passed on, learned and respected by children and our young people and families.

Ngad ga-mak garri-bekkarren garrire garri-wokdi gobohbanj werrk garrben-gurrme gabirri-dokme.

We make sure everyone has a chance to speak and always listen to the old people first.

Children's Ground is different to other organisations because it is run by us-our Elders, our families and all the community that come to Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe. We speak with our own strong voices. Our structure is determined by our Arrente kinship and we follow the leadership and guidance of our Elders. They support each generation to have their say; we want our younger generation to learn from the experience of others and take opportunities to get stronger at leading and telling our story. They are our future leaders. We are governing, designing, delivering and evaluating our 'on the ground' work.

At Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe, we want to show people that we have the right to look after and teach our children in a culturally appropriate way. Our Elders are our advisors, directors and decision makers. It is also good for children to see their grandparents, parents and families getting involved in their learning. We want our children to grow up to be strong in their language and culture and to be proud of their identity and be a part of our community-Mparntwe, Alice Springs. We also want them to grow with a good future in both worlds-Arrernte [as a First Nations person] and the Western way. We still want them to learn Western ways, but we also want to keep our own language and culture strong. This is our right as the First People of Australia, and this is the right of all of us around the world as First Nations people.

We have always been told that the Western way is the better way. A better way than what we already had. We have never been validated for our knowledge. Now at Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe we are being recognised.

"Ampe akweke anwerne-kenhe areye apmerenge akaltye-irreme Ampe akweke anwerne-kenhe areye itne impene anthurre aneme.

Country is a powerful place for kids to learn; to relax their body, mind and soul. It's a place to rest. Learning on Country is the number one priority for our kids."

Mrs L. Palmer, Elder, Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe Director (dec.)

Apmere | The Importance of the Land in our Education System

Our educational system comes from the land. Our worldview, our curriculum and our learning comes from Apmerengentyele. The impact of colonisation has been brutal for First Nations people. The forced removal from traditional lands and the colonisation of lands has caused pain and trauma. It has denied us access to the fundamental source of our identity, life and education.

Learning and healing come from the land itself. We are the caretakers for our land and it gives us everything. We don't own the land, the land owns us. We don't hold it, it holds us. This comes in the form of stories, song and dance about land, kinship, language, totems and lore.

When you are on Country you can feel the spirits and ancestors of the land with you. You are communicating with them and they are our guardians. The land is a family member and we all have our different relationships and responsibilities to it. This includes the ampe akweke mape (children).

We know the land is rich in knowledge. It is alive. It teaches and guides us. It holds the law like a court. It holds the art like a gallery. It holds the knowledge like a library. It holds the medicine like a pharmacy and it holds the food like a supermarket. It changes with the seasons and the hours of the day.

When you respect the land, the land respects you. Country has eyes-just like us. Every hill, tree and rock is watching. Every hill, tree and rock is sacred. We are teaching our children to respect the country. They are the next generation who will look after this place. The land teaches them knowledge and respect.

country itnekenge. Itne mpwaremele, unthemele apmere yanhe ikwerele.

Angkentye | The Importance of Language in our Education System

If you go to Europe, the English talk English, the French talk French and the Germans talk German. It is the same for us. We are many Nations and many languages. All our kids need to learn their own language first.

Other children in Australia can learn in their first languages, so why can't we have our kids taught in our own languages when they go to school? We have high expectations. We have always spoken many languages. Our Elders grew up speaking the languages of their country and neighbouring countries. We have always been multilingual.

We want our kids talking Gurindji, Arrernte, Luritja, Warlpiri and English! Our kids will also learn English and Western skills but their culture must come first. We want our children to be proud of who they are.

"Anwerne-kenhe angkentye lyete atyeperre anthurre aneme. Angkentye tyerrtye arrpenhe mape-kenhe atyeperre aneme. Angkentye anwerne-kenhe anwerne apmere-le anyernetyeke re aneme atyeperre.

Our language is sacred to us. Every Aboriginal language is sacred for those who speak it. Words are given to us by the land and these words are sacred."

Dr M.K. Turner OAM

"If we put their language first it will keep their culture strong. I don't want our children to grow up lost and to not know where they come from. They've got to know where they come from, and their skin name. The Elders need to tell them their story so they know..."

Marlene Rubuntja Senior Cultural Advisor

"I'm fluent in Arrernte and English, and I speak a little bit of Luritja and Pitjantjatjara. I can also understand other Arandic languages: Anmatyerr, Alyawarr, Western Arrernte and Pertame."

Felicity Hayes Senior Educator

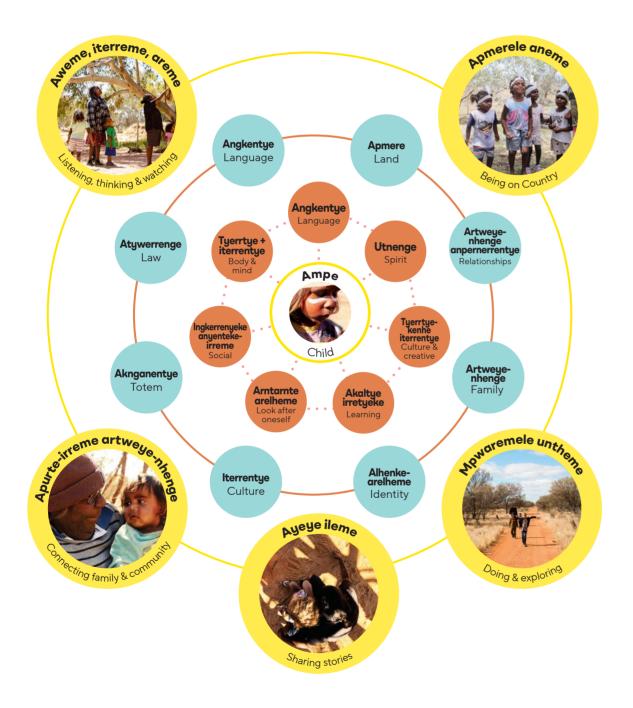
"At Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe, children are able to develop rich cultural and linguistic foundations in their first language and culture. As a Western educator, I support, teach, listen and mentor, working in partnership with First Nations educators as we ensure the children are receiving a holistic education that equips them to walk confidently in all worlds."

Dave Holmes Senior Western Educator



Arrente-kenhe Angkentye

5 Arrente Practices of Teaching 8 Arrente Principles of Learning 9 Arrente Strengths of the Child's Learning



Children's Ground | How our Education System meets Western Learning

At Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe, we have designed our own learning framework called Arrernte-kenhe Angkentye. Through this framework we can teach Apmerengentyele. We can teach our kids literacy, science, history, maths, ethics—all key elements of the Australian Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian curriculum through our worldview and in our way of teaching. But for us as Arrernte people there is more. We have our areas of knowledge and learning that need to be at the centre of our Australian curriculum.

We have had a way of teaching our children over generations, our own pedagogy. Everything is connected: history, music, dance, songs, stories, language, country. That's how it is for First Nations people; this is the way we teach at Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe. This is what we call Culturally Empowered learning (CE).

At Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe, kids are in their own environment with people they know and love and trust and are getting the best learning from that. The children listen quietly and carefully because it's in their language. We value and work alongside Western-trained educators. They teach kids the foundational skills for English numeracy, literacy and knowledge. They are going to go out into the world feeling empowered with cultural pride and be able to navigate in any environment—the Western world or Arrernte world.

There are a lot of kids that don't fare well in the mainstream education system. Teachers are overstretched, classrooms are too big, there isn't one-on-one support. Some kids don't go to school and others are so behind that they are treated like they are in daycare. Kids don't see their parents all day—the kids are taught by strangers. At Children's Ground, we encourage parents to be part of their children's learning. Family needs to be involved, as role models, supporters, mentors and teachers.

We are centring our language and our culture. We are creating our curriculum, we are assessing our children through our standards and cultural KPI's, and we are creating learning resources in first language. We want excellence for our children. We want them to shine. When you look at our ways of teaching you will find that our practice is what many people now recognise as leading practice. Western specialists talk about the importance of teachers, relationships, collaboration, rich learning content, nature-based learning, engaging kids in real world learning and creative thinking. This has always been our way of teaching. We are teaching the knowledge, but we are growing our children to be people who are responsible, capable and confident. Their identity and belonging are their foundation.

At Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe we are also building the evidence. We want to track how we are going and how our children are going. We want our research and practice to be led by us. We want our work, our system and our expertise to become the mainstream system for our children. We have a 25-year evaluation framework and a national research advisory board with researchers from leading institutions across Australia. We are seeing changes in our kids in their learning, their health and their wellbeing. It is early days, but we are seeing the early evidence. We will continue to learn and grow with our children. We are creating a new world with them.

Anwerne apmere-ke ahentye aneme ampe akweke anwerne-kenhe areye mwerre anetyeke. Itne amagketyeke riterrke, akaltye irremele educationeke, ante future mwerre atnyenetyeke Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe apmere mwerre itne aneme. Anwerne areme ampe anwerne-kenhe areye akaltye irrerlenge. Itneke artweye mape itneke itwerle akarelheme. Anwerne ahentye aneme itne mwerre akwete anetyeke.

We want a place where our children are safe—where they can grow up to be healthy, educated and have a better future. Ampekenhe Ahelhe is the place for them. We are seeing our kids learning and loving to learn. Their families are walking beside them. We have hope for the future.

Akaltye-le anthentye-nenhe the anteme akweke ingkernenye mape-ke itne itelaretyeke.

We are leaving this for the younger generations to learn and remember.

Ingkerrekele Arntarnte-areme (Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe Governance Committee.)

The Evidence is Startina to Show What our Elders Have **Always Known: Children's Ground Evidence**

Two evaluations oversighted and endorsed by an expert national Research Advisory Group evidenced the impact of the Children's Ground Approach in two regions.^{1, 2} The key findings included a significant rise in the numbers of children attending and engaged in early years learning in Children's Ground led communities. Nearly all children engaged had previously not participated in early learning. The engagement of family in learning and leadership of First Nations people were significant influencers on the attendance of children

The following are key findings in relation to Closing the Gap outcomes:

CTG Outcomes 3, 4, & 5: Children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education and are thriving.

- Less than 14% of children aged 0-8 years were previously engaged in early years learning
- A new cohort of children actively engaged in Apmerengentyele centred early years learning
- Over 75% of children in each community were engaged in early years learning
- First Nations and Western trained educators report majority of children developing and/or on track against key age and stage benchmarks
- 100% children engaged in early years were learning alongside their family.

CTG Outcomes 8: Strong economic participation and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

- People who were living with chronic unemployment are working
- Employment outcomes have been achieved by establishing a First Nations workforce, recruited and remunerated on the basis of cultural knowledge and expertise.
- In Central Australia (2017-2019):
- 34% of staff had never worked before
- 84% were not working when they started with Children's Ground. Of these 44% had not worked in the past 12 months and 36% had not worked in the past 2 years.

Children's Ground's First Nations-led and designed education not only impacted children's learning outcomes, but it had an important impact on language and cultural knowledge systems and transmission, community safety and employment. Through the recognition of first cultural educators and expertise, First Nations employment within communities increased.

Both the engagement in education and the increase in employment were positive trends against the broader negative downwards trends of school attendance and employment in the Northern Territory Closing the Gap data.

"There are so many things to teach them, our children, so many things. Just as there is in non-Aboriginal culture, there's a lot to learn. They can learn from two domains, non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal. They are located in the middle, that's how we see it. They need good Bininj (Aboriginal) education and good balanda (Western) education—balanced. We want the best for our children.

' Ngaye nga-djare bu nunggah, gun-dulgarre ga-mang ba gagodjgurlugerrenghmen bu ga-djare.'

'We want them to know in their mind and in their heart who they are."

Jaykuk Djandjomerr and May Nango Elders, Children's Ground West Arnhem

"How can you challenge over **60,000 years** of a way of teaching?"

Joanne Willmot Elder and policy advisor, founding member, Utyerre Apanpe

Lorains, J. and Vadiveloo, J. 2019. Children's Ground in Kakadu West Arnhem Final Evaluation - 2013 to 2017

² Children's Ground. 2021. Evaluation of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe-Children's Ground in Central Australia: 2017 to 2019 Baseline and early progress

Lucas learning to crush bush medicine during a cultural health session.



Primary Mpweringke Anapipe children proudly showing off their thipe (bird) creations on Country.

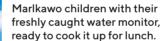




Country is our playground. We love running, jumping and using hills to play.

Painting and learning about the Aboriginal flag.









Chapter 5: Utyerre Apanpe-A National Network of First Nations Educators

It is time for the voices of our Elders to be heard—for the international research to be heard, for our leading practice as First Nations educators to be recognised. It is time for our children to have their right to a system of education that is founded in their language and cultures. This is what we are leading at Utyerre Apanpe.

Utyerre Apanpe: First Nations Educators' Network

In 2019, Utyerre Apanpe (National First Nations Educators' Network) convened as a national body of First Nations educators. Utyerre Apanpe is led by Elders and includes First Nations cultural educators and First Nations educators trained in Western education. This is a growing network and currently includes over 50 people from over 15 different Nations across Australia.

Utyerre Apanpe brings together leading First Nations educational practitioners. The network celebrates leadership and longstanding work of First Nations people who have been calling for reform and recognition for over 50 years. Utyerre Apanpe wants to uplift the exciting work being undertaken by many First Nations across Australia.

The vision of Utyerre Apanpe is to share our knowledge and to establish and maintain a First Nations Education System designed and delivered by First Nations people to ensure the highest quality of education for our children.

The network's terms of reference are to:

1. Support First Nations educators to gather and share practice, knowledge, history and future plans.

2. Establish a National Language and Resource Development centre governed by First Nations educators to set standards and be a shared resource for:

- First Nations learning principles, practice and standards
- Curriculum
- Resources
- Training and workforce development
- First Nations led evidence-based research.

3. Establish a First Nations led education system in Australia.

Utyerre Apanpe Recognises

• The rights of each nation and community to oversee their own educational systems for their children.

• The laws of the land and that these continue to underpin our educational systems as First Nations people.

• That many First Nations people do not live on their traditional lands and live on the lands of others for a range of complex reasons. Notwithstanding, First Nations people have survived this by recognising our protocols and responsibilities and living by these principles wherever we live.

• That First Nations education will be expressed in different ways across different lands as a result of colonial impact, but that it remains our right to develop our systems of education within this context.

"Utyerre connects you, ties you back... The strings in the land... You have to follow that back to where you really belong... where your bloodline lays in the country... from children to grandchildren. It carries a message and keeps you alive. It looks after and guides the family. Utyerre has a message in it. The land next to you is a relationship through Utyerre. The spirit of each country goes into the ground and joins up with the spirits of all those other countries... Aboriginal people know that forever since, and they grow up with that and they learn from that."

Dr M.K. Turner OAM, Elder, Cultural Professor

Utyerre Apanpe Values

- Guided by Elders
- Guided by the laws of the land and our ancestors
- Respect
- Collective vision and collective decision making—inclusion and collaborative governance
- Make sure everyone feels they belong
- Self determination
- Through our culture and aspiration
- Reciprocity—everybody brings something. We give to each other, we share, uplifting everyone
- Extended family structure and practice
- Healing our people and our culture.

This is a network for all interested First Nations educators, uplifting the voices of our educators from all homelands and Nations.

The network recognises the diverse context for First Nations children and families and the complex history of stolen children, stolen lands, stolen languages and cultural harm. It also recognises the strength and leadership that continues in all communities and that the development of a First Nations-led and designed education system requires the voices of each community and language group to determine their development.

The network recognises education as the most important driver for change in our communities and the future of our children.

The network is seeking a significant partnership with the Australian Government to collaboratively lead national education reform for all First Nations children.

¹ Turner, M.K. Iwenhe Tyerrtye: What it Means to Be an Aboriginal Person, compiled by Barry McDonald, translations by Veronica Perrurle Dobson (IAD Press, 2010)



Establish the M.K. Turner Institute as a national centre for First Nations knowledge, practice, research and evaluation in the new First Nations education system. The network will be supported through a range of actions including:

Action: Resource a partnership between Utyerre Apanpe, the Australian Government Indigenous Languages and Arts program (ILA) and First Languages Australia (FLA) to establish a national network of First Nations Language and Literacy Centres, for every First Nations community/language group wishing to maintain, strengthen and revitalise their languages.

Centres will be run by First Nations communities and/or appropriate local community based First Nations organisations, delivering First Nations-led and designed learning (not within Western institutions). Features of these centres include:

• Elders being required to be the senior governors of these centres and remunerated accordingly for their leadership

• Where community schools exist and are run by First Nations communities, the centres being connected to these schools at the recommendation of community

• Language and Literacy centres for remote homelands potentially incorporating a huband-spoke model to service and support each First Nations community, where a language is spoken across a number of communities.

Action: Resource Utyerre Apanpe as a National Language and Resource Development centre.

Action: National Language and Literacy Centres become literacy resource centres for early learning, schools and other educational programs/schools locally and nationally (First Nations and mainstream).







"We have come together as 15 different nations on Arrernte country. We are first cultural educators and leaders. We are inspired to share our knowledge. We recognise the laws of our lands. We belong to the land and the land belongs to us.

We are here because we hold knowledge that has been passed on through generations. We hold the learnings and the ways of teaching from our ancestors. We are here for our future generations.

We recognise our systems of teaching and education as leading practice. We recognise the role of our Elders and our ancestors. We recognise the importance of families and communities in educating our children. We recognise the importance of our languages, to strengthen them and to revive them.

Our curriculum needs to be determined by us. We want to build on the great work of our educators who have developed First Nations curriculum in communities and in the departments. We want to set standards for our own communities and for mainstream education. We want to protect our knowledge systems and laws. We want to ensure that our intellectual and cultural property rights are secure.

The government invests in our despair—in locking up our children, placing them in welfare, dealing with our illnesses, keeping us on Centrelink. We want this investment to be in education and the future of our children. Education is healing. It is a place that we want our children to feel valued, loved and safe in their spirit. Where their knowledge will grow.

We are committed to a future where our children are secure in their identity, their cultural responsibilities as well as western and global opportunities. They are the stewards of the oldest living cultures in the world. We will work to see Article 14 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People recognised and enacted in Australia."² First Cultural education recognises the significance of connection to family and land and how this birthright provides our sense of identity and belonging. First Nations-led and designed and led education safeguards our children. It guides their wellbeing. It establishes the responsibility and accountability each child has to their kinship structure, culture and traditional custodianship of land, and offers the foundation for being successful into adulthood.

We are equipping our children for a global world, where they stand strong in their identity. Through this learning our children grow as people, as we integrate the mind, body, spirit —both knowledge and being. Children must have the foundation of who they are, and upon this teach. They will be equipped in sciences, maths, politics, technologies, arts, history, languages, business, digital technologies and other knowledge critical to their educational journey, success and wellbeing.

Utyerre Apanpe recognises First Nations educators within varied contexts of learning our Elders, our law men and law women, our knowledge holders, our healers, our artists, our holders of ceremony and story. Responsibility is shared. Within the mainstream education system we have first cultural educators employed both as assistants and Western trained teachers. We recognise their efforts over decades to teach our children and create cultural safety in mainstream education.

It is critical that we uplift the authority of our educators who are recognised within our communities—they are our educators through cultural authority. Because they do not have a Western training certificate their voices and authority are often ignored in the mainstream, however their cultural authority is paramount.

Utyerre Apanpe's vision for First Cultural education reform respects the many Nations and languages and diversity of First Nations people across Australia. It maintains the key principle of creating space for locally led approaches to education that respect the integrity of varying knowledge systems, country, culture and law—from remote homelands to the city.

2 Utyerre Apanpe First Nations Education Forum Statement 2019

UTYERRE APANPE FUTURE STATE

- Knowing their identity, cultural laws and responsibilities
- Being creative thinkers, problem-solvers and decision-makers
- Experiencing wellbeing—happy and healthy
- Excelling in first language/s—oral, reading and writing
- Excelling in English—oral, reading and writing
- Excelling in knowledge and skills fit for their local, national and global context
- Connecting first knowledge to global leadership (e.g., land, sea and climate knowledge)
- Economically independent
- Excelling in leadership—navigating change with cultural expertise, experience and cultural humility, just as our ancestors did, with the ability to tackle the greatest challenges in the world.

Our children have the inherent right to education in their first languages and cultures.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Article 14 states:

• Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

• States shall, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for Indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

Government recognises and partners with an independent national **First Nations governance** body to develop and oversight the new First Nations education system.

Recommendation

Action: Invest in and partner with Utyerre **Apanpe as an independent First Nations** Educators' Network (First Cultural learning peak body)

Utyerre Apanpe is an independent network representing the knowledge, expertise and practice of First Nations learning systems. Utyerre Apanpe seeks to work with the Australian Government to establish of a First Nations-led and designed Apmerengentyele learning system in Australia.

Action: Utyerre Apanpe-First Nations Educators' Network be funded as an independent national network (made up of representation from different Nations across Australia and First Nations educational leaders who practice and hold our Apmerengentyele learning systems) with the following responsibilities:

Oversight of the development of a First Nations-led and designed Apmerengentyele learning system led by First Nations people, as part of the national education offering.

Establish standards for First Nations Apmerengentyele learning pedagogy and curriculum for early childhood through to tertiary education as a resource for government and communities working in partnership with key First Nations and non First Nations bodies.

Support communities wishing to implement First Nations-led and designed education and seeking guidance and resources.

Establish a National Language and Resource **Development centre to support First Nations** designed and led learning.

In partnership with the Australian Government Indigenous Languages and Arts program (ILA) and First Languages Australia (FLA), establish a comprehensive National First Nations Language and Literacy Centres program.

Work with government on:

 Legislative change to enable First Nationsgoverned schools and a funding framework to ensure and sustain quality education

- Policy, funding, standards and evaluation of First Nations education-Apmerengentyele schooling
- Education of First Nations students in Australia in mainstream Australian schools (other than those governed by First Nations people) to ensure a culturally relevant education, and that their cultures and languages are recognised and promoted within the education framework
- Recognition of First Nations educators' expertise and remuneration which reflects this unique skillset and expertise
- Effective communication strategies for all government stakeholder groups (e.g., members of parliament, government and shadow ministers, government departments) to ensure First Nations-led and designed education is recognised as the key pillar of all First Nations education systems
- Effective communication strategies for the education sector (e.g., representative teaching and curriculum bodies) to ensure First Nations-led and designed education is recognised as the key pillar of all First Nations education systems.

Utyerre Apanpe will work with a range of national FIrst Nations leaders in language, education, training and curriculum development including but not limited to:

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS) to audit numbers of languages, status of languages, language use and demographics and orthographies needed.

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and standards in curriculum to ensure that they are culturally safe, align with cultural lores and protocols and governance.

Batchelor College and Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and teacher training to support culturally responsive and safe teaching practices and capabilities.

Support relevant bodies in the training, adequate support and recognition of First Nations educators in Western educational settings.

Support relevant bodies in the training and support of non-First Nations educators teaching First Nations students.

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Utyerre Apanpe recognises the First Nations learning and education being undertaken and led by our Elders and cultural practitioners in all Nations across Australia. We recognise the leadership of those who have come before including but not limited to the work of: Yirrkala School, Walpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT), Nyangatjatjara College, Children's Ground, Yipirinya School, as those who are leading practice in Australia in First Nations led education and the many emerging First Nations schools and learning centres. Utyerre Apanpe recognizes the Stronger Smarter Institute as thought and reform leaders in improving outcomes in First Nations

education in the Australian education system as well as the work of IAD, Batchelor College, Tranby Collage, Taoundi College and the other First Nations training organisations across Australia. Utyerre Apanpe is inspired by the next generation of educational leaders

Chapter 6:

First Nations Education Recommendations and Outcomes



Australian governments commit to the establishment of a new First Nations education system.

The Australian Government and states and territories enact policy and legislation to establish a new arm of the Australian education system based on the 65,000year-old Apmerengentyele learning approach, delivering high-quality education to First Nations students—from pre-school to tertiary studies.

Outcome:

First Nations children for the first time have access to an education system that is made for them. As a result they have a strong foundation in their culture and identity, and they experience learning success and pathways to future economic independence and wellbeing.



FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION WITHIN WESTERN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Government recognises and partners with an independent national First Nations governance body to develop and oversight the new First Nations education system.

Harnessing the expertise of the First Nations Education Network, known as Utyerre Apanpe, the framework for the new education system is developed with a focus on curriculum, governance, resourcing, standards and robust processes.

Outcome:

First Nations children are educated in a system with agreed national quality and compliance standards, which is governed by Elders and leading cultural education practitioners, and where the community running the local offering is able to access support, resources and guidance in the Apmerengentyele way of learning.

WESTERN EDUCATION

Australian governments support the teaching of First Nations languages in the new system, through a new national Language of Instruction (Lol) policy.

As they undertake their education, students are taught in the first language of their community. First language policies of instruction are to be adopted nationally, governed by Lol standards consistent with the World Bank 'Loud and Clear' report and international best practice.

Outcome:

First Nations children have a universal right to access and learn in their first language across all subject and learning areas. They are less likely to drop out or repeat grades and their overall learning improves. Children who start their schooling in a first language are also more successful in learning a second language, such as English, according to the World Bank.

Establish a comprehensive national network of First Nations Language and Literacy Centres for every Nation/ language group.

With the implementation of the Apmerengentyele education system, the Language and Literacy Centres provide critical Language of Instruction resources to enable high-quality educational delivery across all learning/subject areas. The Centres have national guidelines but are a locally governed resource for First Nations communities and language groups wishing to maintain, strengthen and revitalise their languages. Resources are available for both the Apmerengentyele education system as well as the mainstream Australian education system.

Today, around 100 First Nations languages are considered at 'severe risk' or 'critically endangered'. They are primarily spoken by older generations and are at risk as Elders pass away. The Language and Literacy Centres stop these languages from disappearing. They also provide a critical resource to the Australian education system and sectors beyond that when they are seeking First Nations systems of knowledge.

Outcome:

Quality learning resources and standards consistent with leading international evidence underpin the Apmerengentyele education system and set out the standards of excellence for First Nations students. There is an increase in the number and quality of first languages spoken across generations and increased awareness, resourcing and sharing of First Nations knowledge across the Australian government, business and public arenas.

Develop and support a First Nations education workforce.

A First Nations Education Workforce Strategy is developed to attract, retain and recognise First Nations educators. The Strategy recognises both cultural educators and western trained First Nations educators and includes requisite cultural authorities. It also improves access and pathways to Western teacher training for First Nations educators.

Outcome:

First Nations children are taught in the Apmerengentyele way by an education workforce that is sustainable, properly remunerated, operates within a framework of high cultural standards and, importantly, is underpinned by First Nations people. The cultural safety and cultural responsiveness of the Australian mainstream education system is improved through a strengthened First Nations education workforce.

Establish the M.K. Turner Institute as a national centre for First Nations knowledge, practice, research and evaluation in the new First Nations education system.

The new M.K. Turner Institute is responsible for overseeing the research, practice and articulation of First Nation knowledge systems and determining how this is shared within the Australian education, research and government systems. The Institute's culturally led research and evaluation contributes to national and international research and practice in Indigenous education.

Outcome:

First Nations children, their families and communities experience a First Nations education system where cultural safety is prioritised and there are robust standards, practices and policies. They experience lower levels of structural racism because there is an improved understanding in the Western education, research and government sectors of First Nations knowledge and practice in education.



STATEMENT FROM A TRADITIONAL OWNER FOR MPARNTWE, FELICITY HAYES

"I am one of the Senior Traditional Owners of Mparntwe. I have been an educator for many years. I am a senior educator at Children's Ground.

When the Ministers of Education met to discuss education on my Country in 2019, I was not informed, I was not invited, I was not asked my permission for you to use the name of my Country in this declaration. Aboriginal people have the same vision for education for our children as the government, but you do not include us and you do not listen to our expertise. <u>Success in education begins with respect</u> <u>and understanding of our culture, our</u> <u>protocols and us as First Nations people.</u>

When you come to my Country again, I invite you to come and meet with me and hear my voice. We have shared our voices and our recommendations in this document. We are waiting for your support, so that we can deliver our education, our way for our children and achieve the vision of the Mparntwe Declaration."

Felicity Hayes, Apmereke-artweye (Traditional Owner) Mparntwe and senior Arrente educator and co-director of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe (Children's Ground).







